MASQUES and MUMMERS

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
3 1761 00888919 8

Charles Frederic Nirdlinger

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/masquesmummerses00nirduoft

MASQUES AND MUMMERS

ESSAYS ON THE THEATRE OF HERE AND NOW

BY

Charles Frederic Nirdlinger

NEW YORK
The DeWitt Publishing House
34 West Thirtieth Street
1899

SEEN BY
PRESERVATION
SERVICES

LIBRARY
JUN 15 1971
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

COPYRIGHT, 1899, BY
CHARLES BELMONT DAVIS.

PN
2266
N5

THE MERSHON COMPANY PRESS,
RAHWAY, N. J.

TO

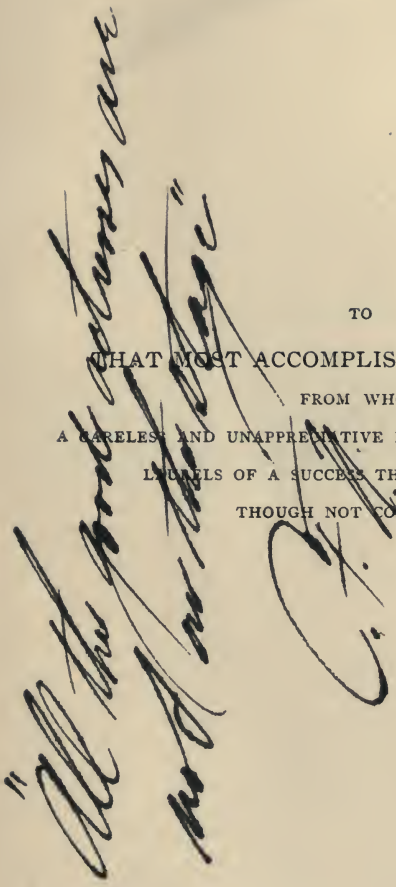
THAT MOST ACCOMPLISHED OF PLAYERS

FROM WHOM

A CARELESS AND UNAPPRECIATIVE PUBLIC HAS WITHHELD THE

LAURELS OF A SUCCESS THAT WAS DESERVED

THOUGH NOT COMMANDED



AUTHOR'S NOTE.

For permission to include in this volume such of my essays as have been printed in *The Illustrated American*, *The Criterion*, *Town Topics*, and *The Empire Magazine*, I am obliged to the proprietors of those publications.

THE AUTHOR.

Contents.

On the Current Nonsense about Acting, . . 3
The Advantages of Anonymity in the Theatre, . 21
Of a New Philosophy of Dramatic Criticism, . 37
The Passing of the Mummer-Isis, . . . 47
A Cabal against the Zeitgeist, ... 61
The White Sow in the Theatre, ... 75
"Cyrano de Bergerac" and Its Lesson in Suggestion, 95
Two Revivals and Their Significance, . . . 105
What the "Prisoner of Zenda" Stood For, . . 121
The Worst of Its Kind, ... 131
Plays of Hypocrisy, ... 141
The One from England, ... 141
The One from France, ... 146
The First Mrs. Tanqueray, ... 153
About a Lady, a Playwright, and an Actress, . 171
Some More of those Misunderstood Women, . 183
A Play that Was Done on the Bowery, . . . 199
"The Great Galeoto," 213
The Moral of Moonshine, ... 225
The Reasonableness of Clorinda Wildairs, . . 237
The Superstition of Brunette in the Theatre, . . 245

Signora's Art and Madame's Antics, . . . 255
When Mr. Irving Fails, ... 267
Beerbohm Tree and Some Digressions, . . . 277
The Influence of Mrs. Potter and Mr. Bellew, . 289
The Retirement of the Dean and Its Inspiration, . 299
In Tribute to Some Threatened Landmarks, . . 309
The Out-of-Town Audience, ... 323
Marginalia, ... 333
The Perils of Illicit Particularity, . . . 335
An Actor of Distinguished Obscurity, . . 340
The Curse of a Vis Comica, ... 342
The Revolt of the Unwilling Dandy, . . 346
Evading a Reputation, ... 348
The Potency of Smudge, ... 350
An Unnecessary Importation, . . . 354
The Undoing of Miss ——, ... 359
Familiar Criticism, ... 362
Of a Lady's Voice, ... 395
Mr. ——'s Masterly Impersonation of Himself, 368

On the Current Nonsense about Acting

On the Current Nonsense about Acting

SOME time ago a cherished friend of mine departed this life, leaving behind him an exhausted bank account and a widow young and pretty and still ambitious. The lady did me the honor, shortly after her bereavement had taken on the conventional dash of lavender, to call on me, ostensibly to seek counsel in regard to her future livelihood, but really to inform me of her determined purpose in the matter: She was going on the stage.

"On the stage?" I wondered—"In what capacity?"

"Why, as an actress, of course!" she returned in surprise; "I'm going to be an actress."

"You've quite decided?" I persisted, incredulity getting the better of courtesy.

"Oh, yes; quite. I think it will be splendid."

"Doubtless—a most alluring occupation, that of the player. But there are others. Why not become a sculptor, or a painter, or a poet, or a novelist?"

"But I don't know anything about sculpture, or painting, or writing," the lady admitted with refreshing modesty.

"Then I presume, of course, that you do know something about acting."

"Oh, no!" was the confident reply; "but that's a very different thing."

At the time I did not think it was; and I fancied, too, that I had started a thought in the mind of my caller that would convince her, on reflection, of the justice of my suggestion. This was a delusion, however, for on the stage she went, and—*mirabile dictu!*—within a year or two she was one of the most considered and considerable actresses in the United States. Lauded by the critics—"a veritable artiste," some proclaimed her, "artiste to her finger-tips: she must have been taught in the best schools of Europe"—delightful to the public, a source of spirited squabbling among rival managers. In brief, a conspicuous success in every feature of the enterprise. I could only felicitate her on not following my advice. It was practically certain that she would not have prospered so promptly or so well in sculpture, or painting, or poesy, or in any of the arts of which she possessed, in the beginning, quite as much knowledge as she did of acting.

This episode—it is by no means a prodigy—recurred to me during the excited discussion evoked by the utterances of a certain French actor anent the condition of the dramatic art in this country. I have no intention to offer any opinions, either of approval or disapproval, of Monsieur Febvre's views on the American stage, nor do I think it would profit much to winnow the chaff from the grains of wisdom that have sprung up in the shadow of the playhouse from the dragon's teeth sown by the stranger.

Indeed, the surprise of the affair, to my mind, is that there should have been found so many persons to take the comments of the foreign critic seriously. For Monsieur Febvre is an actor, and, assuming for the moment that there is such a thing as an art of acting —or rather, the art of acting—the truth remains that the actor, of all men, is the least qualified, the most poorly equipped to discuss the rules or the tenets of his pursuit. He knows nothing of the art of acting—again assuming that there is such a thing.

Before flouting finally this seeming paradox, pray reflect that in the very nature of things the actor must be ignorant of that of which he often prates so eruditely and authoritatively. He cannot see himself as others see him. He can judge of the effectiveness of his methods or manners or personality, or of all together, only through the medium of his audience. Take away this latter factor in the equation and there is left—nothing. When a painter has done his picture he can determine, with absolute finality, quite by himself—if he be really an artist—without the assistance of anyone, whether his achievement be true or false. There are certain laws, based on the eternal verities of beauty, laws of perspective, of drawing, of proportion, of light and shadow and coloring, by which the painter may know, to the nicety of a hair's breadth, whether his work be good or bad. So with the sculptor, with the poet, with the musician ; each has within his own consciousness and attainments the means of ascertaining whether the product of his effort be misshapen or

halting or discordant, as the case may be. But the actor, to determine the virtue of his achievement, needs another presence, another intelligence. All that he can know of his art is that which is reflected by the emotions of his audience. In a theatre emptied of spectators there can be no such thing as acting. Monsieur Febvre himself, one of the most skillful mimers of the generation, might stand on the stage of the proud Comédie Française and chant the heroics of Corneille until the chandeliers rattled, but unless receptive and responsive senses other than his own were present to play upon, his gesture and elocution and passion would have no existence in art, nor in anything else. They would be *nil.*

It is possible to conceive, perhaps, that an actor might so stir his own sentiments, arouse his own emotions, work upon his own imagination, delude his own senses, as actually to participate in the passion that he set out to feign. His heart might come to throb with real grief, his eyes dim with real tears, his whole being to be affected with real sorrow. But, plainly, at such a point dissembling ceases. The acting transforms into reality, and when it becomes reality it is no longer acting! That follows as certainly as the Q. E. D. of Euclid.

How, then, can one justly claim to know absolutely that which, we have seen, he can in the essential conditions know only vicariously—through the medium of sensibilities other than his own? What fatuity, therefore, what *blague*, for Monsieur Febvre or any other

actor to put himself up as an authority on the art of acting! If some deity should give the actor the boon the poet craves for mankind in general, he would then in all likelihood be entitled to discuss with finality the inspiration and the mechanics of his vocation. Since, however, he cannot see himself as others see him, he may pretend to no taste or judgment in the matter. To the tentative argument that such self-insight is among the possibilities in the affair, I should venture a dogmatic denial. And that, too, in fairness to the actor. For it is charity to presume that if such were the case many of our mummers would instantly withdraw from the stage.

It is a curious fact that in all the pregnant discussion that followed in the train of Monsieur Febvre's fol-de-rol, discussion ranging from badinage to buncombe, from philippic to puerility, from *jeu d'esprit* to jingoism, there was ever present the assumption that there is such a thing as an art of acting. It does not seem to have occurred to any one of the players, or managers, or dramatists, or coryphees, or chorus-girls who dignified the Frenchman's nonsense by their sober concern, that it may be in the nature of a false premise—this initial proposition.

Monsieur Febvre asserted agreement with Aristotle in denominating acting an art. And so did the tailor's dummy set up as leading-man of a modish theater; and, likewise, the realistic tramp of "The Old Homestead" fame—both of whom the graduate of the Théâtre Français pronounced great actors and finished

artists. But even in the face of such consilience one may risk the wrath and contumely involved in an equanimous consideration of the question.

If acting be an art, it is unique among its kind in requiring none of the greater faculties whose exercise is essential to any form of successful achievement in the others.

Indeed, it is by no means obvious that such an elemental instrument as intelligence, save of the rudest sort, is necessary to the actor. One would not imply, of course, that there are no intelligent actors, or, rather, that there are no actors who happen to be intelligent; but the contention is that the faculty may be absent, or present only in inchoate development, without materially hampering the work of the mummer or militating against his scenic effectiveness. A mere unreasoning child, with intelligence no keener or nicer than that of a clever spaniel, may be brought, by a few weeks of patience, to produce a stage figure flawless in apparent conception and execution, complete in illusion. No one would predicate that that same child could be driven into a similar marvel in sculpture or painting or literary composition. Who, too, has not seen pantomimes performed with distinction and conviction by horses and dogs; whole dramas, in some instances, carried out with seeming understanding and infectious sympathy? And yet a picture painted by a horse would deceive no one. The finest conceivable canine intelligence, brought to the highest possible point of training, could not be made to bark in numbers.

An infinitude of arguments advance eagerly to maintain the proposition that neither natural intelligence nor education is an inseparable accompaniment of mimetic prosperity; but perhaps instances form the most thoroughly clinching proof. One has but to recall the recorded truths regarding the mental equipment of such an actress as Rachel, the greatest tragedian the stage has ever known, to realize that the densest ignorance is not incompatible with dramatic genius. Or, even better, one has but to ponder the mental status of the average actor of one's immediate acquaintance.

If acting be an art, it is unique again in that it requires no preparatory training or experience. The episode of my friend's venturesome widow related above is an instance in point; and I reiterate, it is no prodigy. George Moore cites in support of a contention not unlike mine in purpose, the statement of one of the leading actresses in Great Britain in regard to the enormous favor accorded her first scenic enterprise: "It was actually my first appearance on any stage," quoth she; "I had no previous experience, even as an amateur." Mary Anderson winged her way at a single flight into the central blue of the theatrical firmament. Mrs. Potter, whose performance of *Miladi* in "The Musketeers" is a regnant admiration of London, displayed fully as much craft and charm in the first blush of her scenic career when she sounded the depths and shallows of Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*. I know women, not of the stage and without the faint-

est notion of their latent possibilities, who, with a few rehearsals and some encouragement, could carry on just as Mrs. Carter does in "Zaza." Could such things be, if acting were really an art or anything else more exalted than audacity or, at best, instinct?

Every real art is governed and preserved by rules, tenets and traditions based on certain verities of natural and universal significance; truths deduced from unvarying conditions, from absolute facts, whose virtue must endure as long as the fixed planets hold their place in the skies.

Vanity, conceit, egotism, all the meanest and most selfish impulses of humanity—these are the sources and inspirations of the laws that obtain in the so-called art of acting. The traditions and practices of the theatre attest this. The center of the stage belongs to the star, the favorite, not because of any reasons inhering in artistic right and truth, but because from time immemorial the star, the favorite, has been able to make his vanity prevail over verity. "The principal actors would never allow another to speak before them," the records of the state theatre of Athens in the Golden Age tell us, "lest he should prepossess the audience; and the inferior performers were obliged to lower their voices, even though clear and sonorous, that they might not be louder than their superiors."

An art indeed!—an institution where prevails such extravagance of artificiality, where the follies and weaknesses of mankind rise superior to the elemental

dictates of logic and of that beauty that is the essence of truth!

In what other department of æsthetic endeavor does accident exercise such prepotency as in acting? If every other argument fell to the ground, the authority of chance in scenic achievements would by itself exile acting from the realm of the arts. Accidents happen in nature, that occasionally blunders; but in the philosophy of art chance is a monstrous absurdity, an impossibility even. Consider, though, in what degree an actor is dependent for his charm, command, and consequent effectiveness upon characteristics purely personal to himself; how much his so-called art is subservient to the accidents of person, feature, nerve currents that render his individuality magnetic or repellent. A hunchback, a monster who never had a woman's smile, may rhyme the daintiest madrigals, a sonnet to his mistress' eyebrow; or limn a canvas replete with such woodland nymphs as Corot fancied; or carve a marble Aphrodite to steal your soul away; or work in bronze a Hercules that shall stand for all time a model of prowess. And for any or all of these things he will need but his art.

Let your hunchback or your Cyclops, though, attempt to play *Romeo*—the house would be upon him—and the critics, too—as the Philistines were upon the giant in the temple! What has art to do with the curt body and impudent face that make a Coquelin peerless among *Figaros;* or with the physical qualities that mark out a Salvini for *Ulysses;* or

with the classic pulchritude that exalts the *Galatea* of Mary Anderson among the marvels of a century; or with the drowsy eyes and amorous lips that predestine a Bernhardt for counterfeits of Oriental languor and lust?

If it were true that acting is an art, with such laws and limitations as control in painting, sculpture, poesy, and music, it would follow that he who transgressed or disregarded these conventions must fail utterly of pleasurable impression. But so far do such accidental qualities as we have just regarded prevail over dictates of the craft, that an actor may snap his fingers at them in disdain, if only chance has given him a figure properly put up, or endowed him with that peculiar balance between nerves, veins, and muscles that constitutes personal magnetism. Of course there are some obvious bounds beyond which even an actor of fascinating individuality may not venture without risk. It were perilous, perhaps, for an Irving even, or a Sonnenthal, to recite the famous soliloquy of "Hamlet" while standing on his head.

And yet, for my own part, I believe that if such an innovation were attempted by an actor of the requisite professional authority and personal allurement, there would be found a plenty of critics and of playgoers to approve and applaud it. Nor would they be at loss for arguments to justify their commendation. "A happy device," they would proclaim the deed—"a conceit of pure genius!" They would marvel that such an ingenious piece of stage-business had never

before occurred to a portrayer of the distracted Dane. What more natural and realistic than for *Hamlet* to discuss the problem of existence while standing on his head? The very sort of thing he would do if he were crazy—as some suppose him—or even if he were trying to make those about him believe that he had gone daft. A veritable inspiration! And in all probability all succeeding *Hamlets* would be expected to drool to-be-or-not-to-be in the inverted attitude of a circus gymnast. For so much does the accident of personal charm count in the cantingly styled art of acting. Endow the player with the mystic gift of animal magnetism—the same equipment that enables the adventurer and the siren to conquer wealth, position, the dominance of nations—and he may laugh to scorn all the most precise formulas, the most cherished traditions of his so-called art. The spectator forgives and forgets his blunder, exults in his outrages upon scenic decorousness.

With an actor so favored it will be as it was with the great Wilkes:

"But he squints," sneered a courtier, when a certain famous beauty was raving over the charms of the ugly statesman.

"Yes," was the sighing reply, "but no more than a gentleman should squint."

What use, then, of dramatic criticism? one may ask, after consideration of these conditions of mere accident and individual import. Why should research, study, analysis occupy themselves with what is inde-

pendent of all valid laws and general restrictions? If acting be not an art, if it be nothing more dignified or noble than affectation, imitation, impertinence, or, at best, instinct, what does it profit to pretend to differentiate the true from the false, the good from the bad? And, above all, who has the right to predicate what is vicious and what virtuous, in point of theatrical æsthetics?

No one has that right. At its best, criticism is but the lament of impotent aspiration. And as for dramatic criticism, it is the most fatuous and feeble of pursuits. It is in every case either preposterous or presumptuous. And I beg the privilege of stating, in this connection, that I have on more than one occasion been shocked and vastly grieved to find that desultory essays that I have from time to time occupied with subjects of the stage were regarded in some quarters as dramatic criticisms.

Nothing could have been further from my desire or intention—that these idle reviews, these mere indiscretions, should have the semblance of dramatic criticisms. I trust that henceforth anything I may write of the stage and its people will escape such a charge. For I should dislike even to seem to pretend to a right that I maintain belongs to no one.

It is the privilege of any man to say and to print what pleases his fancy or scratches his nerves in a theatrical performance. But to set himself up as an authoritative arbiter of the merits or demerits of plays or players, that is quite another matter. The former

procedure is permissible, because it neither attempts to prove anything nor to justify the individual's particular fancy, save in a purely personal way. The circumstance that what delights the writer may be equally winning to a thousand others must not be given undue importance. He may be quite wrong æsthetically, and the episode that his mistake is shared by a multitude does not add an iota to the virtue of his utterances. Indeed, when one reflects how little we know, any of us, of what constitutes absolute truth and beauty in such a casual, accidental, inconsequential affair as miming, it would seem not only modest, but logical, to conclude that what we like is probably bad, and what we dislike good.

A dusty critic—a regular out-and-out professor of the drama—once took me severely to task in his journal because, in a preface to a volume of theatrical essays, I denominated my opinions, or rather utterances, as "notions." He denounced the term as intentionally slighting. In point of fact, what I sought to indicate was that all judgments regarding scenic devices and their protagonists are, and must ever be, merely matters of personal fancy or caprice. The taste of one man, or of a thousand men, or of ten thousand men, is no criterion, no court of last appeal. Monsieur Febvre, for example, startles us with the discovery that in that tailor's dummy and in that realistic tramp above alluded to we have been entertaining artistic angels unawares. Now, who shall say that Monsieur Febvre is wrong? Who shall stand forth and protest that all the thou-

sands who have failed to recognize the mimetic genius of these worthy players were not wanting in sensibility and discernment in denying them greatness? Plainly, such problems as these resolve themselves into matters of opinion—affairs of which much may be said on both sides. More, perhaps, on one side than on the other; but, still, much on both sides.

That dramatic criticism should have persisted in the face of its proved futility—that is what amazes one. That men should have clung desperately to a potent privilege that they arrogated to themselves—by what system of reasoning Heaven only knows!—is understandable enough. All things are possible in the philosophy of audacity and conceit. But that the scheme should have endured in general acceptance and esteem, despite its vanity and fatuity, that is the marvel.

Nowhere in the annals of moderns or ancients can one find record of any scenic evil remedied by dramatic criticism, any blunder of play or player radically corrected by the system, any permanent reformation instituted and maintained. The critics of Athens used to exhaust all the tenses, moods, and declensions in pointing out the defects of the popular actors of the day. The classics teem with instances of such laudable occupation, all couched in faultless rhetoric and fine learning. But I fail to discover, after careful research, that they cured Callipides of his strange habit of turning himself full around when his lines dealt with the flight of a discus, or Sosistratus of his over-acting, or

Mnastheus of his custom of seizing the orchestra-leader by the neck and drawing him to himself whenever in the play he was called upon to mention the whirlpool of Scylla.

Of course, dramatic criticism may have taken on new powers of persuasion and conviction since the days of Sophocles and Æschylus and Myniscus and Quintilian and the author of the "The Poetic"; but I should not venture to assert it. And so I question seriously whether their modern successors may hope to avail where they were vanquished. Thus, for instance, Monsieur Febvre and the whole academy of criticism may rail at their will against the drawing-room manners of our actors, but it is safe to predict that the objects of their blame will stubbornly cling to their own peculiar code of elegant modes. And if they elect to place their hats on the floor and their sticks on the mantelpiece, who shall decree the violence of such a procedure?

A player of great celebrity and almost matchless patronage once complained—in the terms generally employed in such circumstances—of my comments on his performance of a certain classic rôle: a performance that damned his mental equipment with the hopelessness of mediocrity. To his violent murmurs I replied, more for consolation than apology, that if I had written with unchecked candor it was because I credited him with a vigorous, wholesome contempt for criticism, and because I realized that he could confidently point to his remarkable prosperity and his splendid favor

with the public to the confusion of his fault-finders. If I had not sought to evade my conviction of the paltry limitations of his talent and craft, and if I had not cared to soften the utterance of that conviction, it was because I was sure it would not lessen the public's opinion of the actor nor the actor's opinion of himself.

The Advantages of Anonymity in the Theatre

The Advantages of Anonymity in the Theatre

A NUMBER of our most pleasing actors have lately become too famous. Confusion from the same cause has from time to time seized other great figures of history—a certain archon of Athens; the arrogant prelate of York; and, most convincing instance of all, the matchless Napoleon himself.

The perils of an embarrassment of glory are brought home so straight and impressively by the troublous careers of these men, and of others almost as conspicuous, that one wonders that our actors have not profited by the lesson. It must be that they are the improvident, light-o'-life lot that tradition paints them. Else they would have yielded to the conviction inhering in such examples, and avoided the ways that lead to excessive reputation. For the result has always been the same—a slow but steady falling-off in favor and its consequent applause; then indifference and neglect; next, distaste; and, finally, blunt condemnation and virtual exile.

Exile? The very word. It is precisely that penalty that has fallen upon the players whose sad and undeserved fate prompted the quest for some practicable remedy of the evil. Everyone even passingly

familiar with the current news of the stage must have noted that several actors of exceptional vogue and reputation have lately been driven out of the playhouses in which they made their most ambitious efforts and won their proudest laurels. They were supposed for a time—and perhaps for even a longer time supposed themselves—to be an intimate and vital part of the institutions to which they devoted their attainments. They received large salaries, the minute attention of the public prints, many tokens of interest and affection from critical audiences. They had, in short, most if not all of the material symbols of permanent favor. Suddenly the bubble bursts. The startled mummer rubs the film from his eyes and reads the manager's polite but poignant suggestion that the actor's withdrawal for a season or two, or even more, would be to the advantage of all concerned. He has become too famous. Public and critics have revolted against the insistence of his identity. His personality has taken on an oppressive pervasiveness. He fills the public eye to a degree that is irritating. In his own modest field of action he has become as Wolsey became to Henry VIII., as Aristides became to the Athenians, and Napoleon to allied Europe.

The manager probably does not say all this to the actor: possibly he doesn't say any of it. He may think it all, but usually he obviates argument by some such consoling comment as—"You're all right, old man"—"You're great—your last creation was a wonder—but, hang it! my boy, I'm afraid they're a

little tired of you. That's all—just tired." And if he is a particularly kindly manager, he will go on to tell the astonished idol, who feels the pedestal crumbling beneath his feet, that he needn't worry over it. Paris has wearied at times of Bernhardt; London of Irving and Terry; the English provinces have been known to betray satiety of the Kendals. And Rome once turned up her imperial nose at Duse!

Before such whelming precedents the actor must bow his head resignedly. In proud submission to the pains of an excessive popularity, an embarrassment of glory, he betakes himself to remote circuits, unfamiliar with his graces and methods and, above all, with his name. And so the fickle town knows him no more.

Obviously it cannot be to the solid advantage of the theatre—this brutal edict into exile of the very players whom but a while ago we deemed of the finest quality and the completest charm. One can easily foresee the demoralization that will eventually seize the public taste if the masters and mistresses of the scene, those who by long training and varied and elaborate essays stand forth criterions, are to be fleered into the background merely because their pervasive fame and obtruding personality cramp our poor imaginations. Think, too, of the monstrous injustice of the thing! Consider how small a part the actor has in the occasion of the offense. The persistence of his presence may be due to nothing more reprehensible than the very richness of his talents, the redundance of his graces. Even when—as has happened in sparse instances—

extravagant exploitation and preposterous notoriety have a share in the event (of course I disregard such accidental factors as wife-beating and debonair divorces) the actor should be held blameless. For it will be found, in the majority of cases, that he is the victim of less squeamish wits that turn his vogue to their own profit. And when, by reason of their tricks and devices, the actor has shed the halo through which the metropolitan public viewed him, he is ruthlessly shoved into the harassments of a "starring" tour or the oblivion of a No. 2 company.

But what remedy for this evil? What specific against that odd satiety that seizes the community periodically to the disadvantage of even the most favored player? Shall our actors give up becoming famous? Shall they court obscurity as they but lately wooed eminence? That were almost too much to ask of mortals.

Nor is there need to go to such extremes. The actor, even he who has suffered most from an exaggeration of popularity, may continue to sue for applause as ardently as ever. But—pen halts and balks a bit before the hazard!—let the actor—fall faintly, ink!—let the actor keep under cover, as it were. Ply the goddess as zealously as ever, but approach her incognito! Exchange the spangled raiment of notoriety for the simple nithsdale of anonymity.

Do not flout the suggestion summarily. At first glance it is shocking, revolutionary, overturning all the fondest traditions and most ancient methods of the

playhouse. Why, someone exclaims, if this suggestion were adopted, henceforth playbills would be printed without the names of the actors! There would be only the list of persons-of-the-drama bracketed against the single line by members-of-the-company. The scheme is without parallel, one protests, in any department of arts and letters.

In denial of this fallacy there instantly occurs to one the system that has prevailed for centuries in the conduct of the chief engines of civilization and politeness. To what does journalism—the very handmaiden of the theatre—owe its influence and control but to the anonymity that is its essential spirit? The public never tires of the bright young men or the profound old ones who direct and correct the general taste in the columns of the "great dailies." But how long would this happy condition continue if the reader were confronted with the names of these dogmatic mentors every time he picked up his favorite blanket sheet? And if—as is the case in the theatre—the reader were confronted continually with a personal view of his entertainer and instructor, if he came to acquire that familiarity with appearance, manner, and mannerism that we have seen work such disaster in the illusions of the playgoer—how long would "great dailies" remain truly great in the imagination of the public? Just as the dissemblance of individualism makes for the lasting potency and delight of journalism, so would the eradication of the personal quality in the actor assure his unchanging favor.

Perhaps the most obvious advantage that would come to the player from the repression of his identity, as tokened, for example, by the omission of name from the playbill—lies in the greater ease with which the auditor might be deluded. Relieved of every impression of the player's personality, his imagination could be turned with vastly greater ease to the single consideration of the author's creation. Under the system of anonymity the spectator would give no thought to the player in his egoistic quality, but only to the character he impersonates. The illusion would be pure, unmixed with any sense of art or artifice or accidents of individuality. And that, it will be admitted, is the first purpose and full perfection of scenic symbolism.

Nor would the consequent pleasure be with the spectator alone. Think of the exquisite delight with which the world-famed Mr. Buskin would hear the applause bestowed upon his performance of some part intrinsically unimportant, but lifted into considerableness by his natural gifts and refined craft! How the soul of such an artist would rejoice in the knowledge that the approval of his audience was based in no part upon his geniality, his polite manners, his witty conversation, the cheery complexion of his general make-up, that never fail to bring him enthusiastic acclaim quite regardless of the merits or demerits of the transformation actually under notice. What a satisfaction to Mr. Buskin, the artist, to realize that it is in that capacity he charms and commands his audience, and that Mr. Buskin, the man, the hero of the Rialto,

the inspiration of the paragraphers, has no part in the achievement! For it must be borne in mind that if this proposed system of anonymity be properly carried out in all its details, the personal identity of even the great Mr. Buskin lies buried among the members-of-the-company.

Take the case, again, of the irresistible Soccus, at whose mere appearance audiences are accustomed to shake their sides in laughter, before he has uttered a speech or cut a grimace—wouldn't he chuckle inwardly to find that he can work the same marvel upon an audience that doesn't know him from Adam? Fancy, too, the glee—not without a touch of bitterness and revenge—of the renowned Cothurnus, who has been playing one or two parts for the past forty years, and whom the public, from long intimacy with the excellence with which he plays these parts, has deemed incapable of playing any others—fancy his gratification when the house rises in enthusiasm over some totally new and novel impersonation! For the audience, being ignorant of the identity of the player, would have no prejudice against the innovation; and the actor, unhampered by the stubborn fancy of his spectators, could easily prevail by virtue of the alleged art and intelligence that had brought fame and fortune to his hitherto curt repertory. Possibly he himself might have come to believe that he could play no other part well. And then to see a vast audience, boxes, orchestra and gallery, hail with delight his performance of some unfamiliar rôle—what could be

sweeter than his discovery of the hitherto unsuspected possibilities of his craft?

Suppose for one brief moment—any prolonged supposition might be trying—suppose on the occasion of that memorable all-star production of Sheridan's play, the glorious masters of their calling had mixed up their rôles, so to speak; and suppose, further, that each and every one of them had gone on so effectually disguised as to render detection impossible—of course appropriate make-up should always do that—and then performed their respective rôles in an atmosphere of complete mystification as their actual identities. Who could have resisted the multiplied perfections of such a performance? *Bob Acres* would have been *Bob Acres*, and not Mr. Jefferson; *Mrs. Malaprop* would have been *Mrs. Malaprop*, and not Mrs. Drew; *Lydia Languish* would have been just the fantastic, sentimental, overstrung jade that lived in Mr. Sheridan's fancy, instead of being perhaps some equally pleasing but less classic lady living in Harlem or Yonkers. In the hands of such a company as the one in reference, all the members of which had discreetly stopped just this side of becoming too famous, the characters would have been presented as Mr. Sheridan conceived them, instead of being presented as the actors thought Mr. Sheridan should have conceived them. That, by your leave, would have been an ideal theatrical performance, wherein we should have had the characters in play, instead of the players in character.

If it be true that the actor of established reputation

and popularity would derive profit in his calling, both as regards its relation to himself and to the public, from the proposed scheme of anonymity, what vastly greater vantage would come to the player still obscure, with talents or even genius unrecognized by the public and unacknowledged by criticism. Under this new system, which I confidently believe needs only persistent proclamation to secure adoption, the flowers of histrionism, now sprouting unnoticed, unseen, might instantly burst forth for all they are worth. Manager's partiality, critic's prejudice, the crowd's inclination toward that which has been noisily hailed as great, the intrigues of the greenroom even, could no longer prevail against gifts freed from the burden of an unknown name. For, plainly, where there are no names the accident of obscurity could work no disadvantage. Before audiences uninfluenced—as under existing conditions they must be—by considerations of fame and paragraphs, the merest novice, fresh from the crossroads village, stands as good a chance for the prompt recognition of his capacities and attainments as the most skillfully exploited campaigner from the most modish of London theatres. Deprived alike of the glory of a great name and the apology of an obscure one, the twain must tilt with equal arms for popular applause and critical esteem. And if it thrills the great Mr. Buskin to find that he can sway and carry an audience in some petty rôle brought to conspicuosity by skill and finish acquired in years of important endeavor, what must be the exaltation, the

frenzy of the poor, unknown Fag, whom some happy chance has intrusted with a mighty rôle in which the audience would not have tolerated him for an instant had the playbill betrayed his unfamiliar name and inconsiderable rank! And when Fag almost reels before the stunning salvos that proclaim his success, you may be sure that Fag will appreciate the merits of the scheme that puts him on a par with the kings of his calling. For the moment, at any rate, Fag realizes the advantages of anonymity in the theatre.

There is no denying that the sudden and general introduction of the system would compel some sacrifices on the part of a few actors; but as these sacrifices are, in the main, of a temporary and purely material character, I believe they would be met with a cheerful spirit and even proudly. The actor has always been notably quick and eager to surrender any merely personal advantage in the cause of his pursuit. At first it will doubtless come hard for some players to give over the peculiar personal prominence which may have been their chief distinction. To reverse the experience of Lord Byron—to wake up some morning and find that they have suddenly ceased to be famous; that the newspapers no longer record their doings; that their pictures have been withdrawn from the photograph shops; that the hoardings no longer display their presentments in the gorgeous colors of lithographer's craft; that last night's playbill dissipates their prominence among "members-of-the-company"—one may well believe that this will not be a wholly

pleasurable novelty. So far as the world goes, they have thrown their individualism to the winds. They have ceased to be anything but an appropriate and sympathetic part of the harmonious and symmetrical entirety.

"It is all very beautiful"—one can imagine some submissive but skeptical mummer sighing to himself—"it is all very beautiful—but it isn't acting. Not as we have always understood acting."

And then as time goes on to miss their names in the daily columns of theatrical prattle and gossip, and to see the town jogging along apparently quite unconcerned by this sudden omission of small talk of stage people—that will bring a twinge to some hearts, one can well believe. There will doubtless come a keen pang of regret to the adorable Araminta Rosebud when she finds that under the new conditions of the theatre, which impose upon the player a code of conduct not unlike that regulating other departments of the arts and letters, she may not tell to the world the sad story of how, when playing in Providence a few nights ago, she received a dispatch announcing the death of her favorite grandmother, but that, feeling that she could do no good at home and realizing at the same time that she belonged to the public and had public duties to fulfill, she had, with magnificent courage and true womanliness, remained with the company and gone through her part without betraying the grief that was gnawing at her heartstrings, though she fell in a dead faint the instant the curtain had fallen.

So, too, it will seem cruel to Miss Vestalia Vavasour when she cannot announce to the world, through the medium of her private press-agent, that her young brother had abstracted from her jeweled purse the larger part of the enormous salary that she receives at the fashionable Alhambra Theatre, and that despite the fact that her wayward relative had squandered her hard-earned wages in bicycles and gingerbread, still, out of consideration for her aged parents, to whom she is devotedly attached, she has decided not to prosecute the young man, but would merely have him sent to the House of Correction. And then the actor who is constantly saying those immensely witty things that have not been said before in the last fifty years, and whose clubmates insist that he could write like Shakespeare or Gilbert or Scribe, or anybody that ever lived, if he only had a mind to—it will cost him something to know that his rollicking sallies and cutting quips cannot come to the knowledge of the town, and must remain henceforth within the portals of his club and dressing room.

No one would seek to depreciate the noble abnegation involved in the surrender of such privileges as I have pointed out. Nor would one underestimate the chances that some of our most popular actors run in foregoing the impressiveness of an established and familiar name. In the present condition of the general taste and discrimination an absolute reliance upon talent and acquirements, together with the sudden abandonment of the adjuvant three-sheet and press-

agent, is not without its temporary perils. But there seems to be no halfway ground in the plan that we have been considering. The scheme, to be effective, must be radical and universal. It must comprehend the world-famed Mr. Buskin as well as the obscure Fag. For there is to telling when Buskin himself may become too famous.

Of a New Philosophy of Dramatic Criticism

Of a New Philosophy of Dramatic Criticism

AN inept idea lately went out to the effect that the true purpose of criticism is to praise; that talent feeds and flourishes on eulogy, and that therefore the proper end and aim of criticism is not scrupulous analysis, but flattery. The notion is so ridiculously absurd that it might fairly be dismissed without serious notice, but for the fact that it has been received with much favor in some high quarters and advocated with passionate energy.

In the theatre in particular the attractive fallacy has been accepted as gospel truth. Managers, actors, the lesser playwrights, together with their parasites and satellites, proclaim their approval and predict the speedy desuetude of the existing scheme of critical review. It is fair to presume that they are prompted in their enthusiastic show of favor for the quaint suggestion by an unmixed desire to provide talent with a plenty of the material on which it is alleged to feed and flourish; it is not likely that motive of gain or vanity has any part in their hearty approbation. For improvidence and diffidence have long been notorious attributes of the theatre, and they have never been so distinctly in evidence as here and now.

But the perplexing element in their unselfish con-

cern for the nourishment and development of talent is the fact that talent—the real thing—has never cared a finger's snap about criticism—whether it be laudatory or condemnatory, kindly or cruel, rapturous or contemptuous, or whether or not it be at all. A man or woman endowed with the instinct of what is right and what is wrong in artistry is utterly beyond the reach of such influences. To a mind conscious by spontaneous conviction of the truth or falsity of its methods, praise or blame is alike indifferent—alike impotent to exhilarate or depress. It has as little use or need for commendation, flattery, as a healthy man has for sugar plums.

Against assaults of envy, personal animosity, captiousness or ignorance, against esoteric influences of any description, talent is utterly secure—as secure as virtue. Nor violence nor seduction can swerve it a hair's breadth from the line of artistic rectitude.

With the pretension that in these days passes for talent it is quite another story.

Based chiefly on egotism, frowardness, impudent self-confidence, temperamental immodesty, it follows as a matter of course that honest criticism is hostile to its prosperity and even to its sustained existence. Hollow and insubstantial, it requires the bolstering of deception and flattery, of unreasoning, ignorant public acclaim, of general demoralization and carelessness in æsthetic taste and critical conscience. And so the product of personal presumption and audacious exploitation demands the means of its subsistence:

demands it as a right—not a favor—and justifies that demand by reference to the newest conceit regarding the valid philosophy of criticism.

Not that the truth lies at the other extreme; that criticism must occupy itself wholly or even mainly with jealous analysis of a work of art or artificiality, with senses avidious for faults and blunders. That, of course, means hypercriticism, which is as much of a nuisance and as strongly indicative of disease as hyperæsthesia. And so unavailing is it against the deserts of crafts and talents that the world regards it as no more than an interesting abnormality. Zoilus, the Amphipolite, after his arduous and bitter attacks on Homer, had only his labor for his pains—and the popular surname of "Homer's Scourge." As for the two other over-nice reviewers of tradition—all we know of Bavius and Mævius is that they damned themselves to immortal fame by provoking a sneer from Virgil and a snub from Horace.

But because captiousness has properly no place in criticism, it does not follow that censure is beyond the pale. Indeed, no less an authority than the French Academy long ago decreed that censure is the essential virtue of criticism; "for it is an established truth," the Immortals predicate, "that praise is less potent to urge us on in the path of virtue than blame is to deter us from the path of vice." This conclusion they reach by considering the negative quality of society wherein the majority of men strive not so much to achieve honor as to avoid dishonor.

It is unfortunate that the spirit of this court of last resort of the most exquisite artistic community that the modern world knows has hitherto been so conspicuously absent from American criticism. And infinitely regrettable is it that it has no existence in that department of review and remark that deals with the theatre. Most, if not all, of the multifarious evils of the stage of actual ordering may be traced directly to the condemnable complacency of contemporary criticism. And the worst of it all is that that kindness—not only cruel, but cowardly—has fallen most readily and most advantageously on that which is particularly mean, petty and impudently untrue. Presumption is applauded in deference and in proportion to its temerity. That which is least gloriously earnest and ambitious meets the encouragement, or, at worst, the toleration, of agencies whose duty and business it is to rebuke scenic corruption and to facilitate the progress of the public taste. A chorus girl posing as a prima-donna, with no other equipment than bleached hair and a "backer," is handled with gloves. A flimsy variety show, whose most loudly heralded feature is a half-dozen beauties imported to allure the rakish element of the town, is proclaimed a device of consummate skill—a masterpiece that shows the living manners! A contemptible farce, stupidly acted, that an expert management brings from England, determined to compel the local public to patronage for a year, is either lauded as a sparkling gem of wit and humor, or else apologized for in an infinity of ways.

Only let the effort be trivial enough, paltry, silly, imponderable, and criticism feels called upon to give itself over to that new philosophy that preaches kindness, or, at the worst, complacency. 'Even though you think the achievement meretricious, subversive of honest taste,' this idiotic doctrine implies, 'you must not declare your conviction; for individual judgment should not venture to differentiate between pretension and talent as proclaimed by the multitude. And talent must have flattery; it feeds on it as the suckling babe on milk.'

'Individual judgment'—that intimates, of course, that the opinion of the general is the reliable arbiter in these matters.

And that, apropos, is one of the cardinal tenets of the new academy under notice; that the "public," in the jargon of the institution, is the best judge—particularly as to its entertainment.

That is the most malefic sentiment that ever gained prevalence; it is diametrically opposed to truth.

The "public"—in the sense that the term is vulgarly used—is the worst judge.

One has modern and ancient instances of the justice of this dogmatic assertion. The Spanish "public" finds its darling entertainment in gory bullfights. It is only sixty years since the English "public" was deprived by law of its fondest sport, bull-baiting.

A Roman holiday was celebrated by turning scores of Christian maids into an arena full of tigers, lions and panthers. There were "popular prices" at the

Colosseum on such occasions, that all of the "public" might enjoy their favorite diversion. Lascivious exhibitions and riggish conceits are among the most frequented and profitable schemes of current threatrical exploitation.

But it is not the public, the real public, that demands the sort of entertainment thrust upon it by shameless purveyors. There are, doubtless, a number of persons, a vast number, who are attracted to the playhouses where libidinous monstrosities hold the stage.

But these do not constitute the public.

Persons engaged in pursuits dependent on general patronage so frequently blunder in this matter of the make-up of the public. They seem to think that the public means the scum of the community, the residuum, or the froth; that it is a vast, chaotic, unreasoning horde of feeble or idiotic minds, fickle in emotion, given naturally to viciousness, and bent on mischief generally.

That may be the mass, but it isn't the public.

It is unfortunate that social philosophers and social economists have not clearly formulated the distinctive differences of the two.

The public is the element of order in a community: the element of pure intelligence—culture does not enter into the matter—of moral sentiment and of clean living. The public tends patriotically and in the spirit of broad humanity toward a higher plane in the common life.

It is by no means always dominant in the matter of

mere numbers. Indeed, at times and under certain conditions, it may be vastly in the minority numerically. If in a community of outlaws there be one honest man who strives toward the improvement of those around him, who conducts himself, so far as his circumstances permit, in accordance with decency and philanthropy—using that word in its primary signification—that one man constitutes the public in that particular social body.

Of course a theatrical manager could hardly be expected to consult the tastes of such a sparse clientage. But when in a metropolis of two millions he pretends that it is the public that demands and delights in his vicious exposition, he either insults the respectable body of citizens or else he is ignorant of the meaning of the word that comes so trippingly from his tongue. It is the scum, the residuum, the froth of society that frequents his bawdy spectacle. The public stays away and occupies itself with the protection of those who are in danger of coming within the contaminating influences of vicious exhibitions in the theatre.

So much for the judgment of the "public"—in the use of the word that requires quotation—as to what is good in entertainment; good in itself, and for the "public" self.

And that brings me to the consideration of what constitutes the real purpose, the final utility of criticism. With the performer in his personality, with the individual effort or achievement, it has no direct business.

It is only with the general taste, with its direction and correction, that it must concern itself. It is not the province of criticism to occupy itself with the encouragement or the discouragement of those who provide the common entertainment or of those engaged in any of the departments of fine crafts and letters. Let criticism but discover the truth to the general and strive its utmost to bring them to a realization and appreciation of what is sincere and what is fictitious, what ugly and what beautiful, what honest in art and what meretricious, and it will have done its whole duty. With the effect on the individual of such a course, criticism, I repeat, has no concern.

That may be a chill and stoic philosophy, but it has the virtue of verity. And, if it does not minister to genius—as the new school of criticism pretends it should—neither does it delude pretension.

The only part that the individual plays in the scheme is to enable the critic to insinuate his lesson in the concrete form, easily comprehended by the lay mind, instead of in the abstract form, which requires the employment of faculties that the public either from indolence or incapacity is not likely to call into action.

The Passing of the Mummer-Isis

The Passing of the Mummer-Isis

I HAVE an actor-friend whose opinions on matters pertaining to the theatre I value immensely—because they are always wrong. And as he never talks of anything under the sun except the theatre—never of books or pictures or politics or science or morality or even immortality—save that of players' fame—his conversation is to me an unfailing source of instruction, delight and inspiration. I have a suspicion that if he were foolish enough to venture an expression of views on any of the departments of human activity excepting that in which he moves and has his being he would be a bore; but, occupying himself solely with Shakespeare and the musical glasses, so to speak, he is a veritable boon. His idlest notion on acting or plays or scene-painting or the public—he has a great deal to say about "the public"—or anything connected with what is called the profession, never fails to start a suggestion toward the opposite and toward the true. He is a mentor more certain, more constant and more genial than the most scrupulous study, earnest thought or proved instinct could be.

If his chance observations direct so surely and so unhaltingly toward what is true and beautiful and just in his calling, what terms can fitly set forth the virtue

of his deliberate opinions, the worth of his views resulting from severe thought, profound consideration and precise expression? Often troublous, disheartening doubts on some matters of theatric import have instantly dissipated before the *ex-cathedra* utterances of my actor-friend. Experience—to say nothing of instinct—has so impressed me with the validity of the formula that orders the exact opposite. There is no going wrong so long as that rule is followed.

He is not niggard of his professional wisdom, nor is he timid or lukewarm in the tone and terms of its proclamation. And yet I do not remember that I ever gainsaid him. It is enough for me to sit and listen. No rapt pupil in the academic groves ever sat at Plato's feet with greater show of credulity and conviction. Why dispute or contradict or even insinuate a differing opinion? The futility, the impertinence of such a step is a foregone conclusion.

What can one who is not of the theatre, nor in the theatre, know about the theatre? What are study, research, acquaintance with the history and traditions of the art—what are native sensibilities, acquired discrimination, correct taste, against a finger-tip knowledge of the significance of R. U. E. and L. U. E. and C. D. and 3 G. and the rest of the cabalistic symbols of "stage business"? Argue, indeed, with one to whom such mysteries are as A B C! You might, it is true, compel something like patient, if not respectful, notice by premising your remarks with a statement that at least those simpler secrets of the Thespian

temple had been betrayed to you by one of the little fifteen-cent editions of Standard Plays that the house of French has given to the world. But hope not to discomfit your opponent by such weapons. For he will instantly come back at you with a retort that though anyone may master the superficial meaning of R. U. E. and L. U. E. and the rest of them, only the actor can inceive to the full the spirit of the symbols. The letters you may learn, yes, but the spirit—only a shrug of the shoulders and upturned eyes can indicate how far that is beyond your ken, in the opinion of one whom the Muse of the mask has taken to her bosom.

Despite my actor-friend's firm conviction that no one not of the theatre nor in the theatre really knows anything about the theatre, he appears to place considerable importance on what is printed of his performances by some of those same presumptuous pretenders. I have tried my utmost to make him share my own opinion of the so-called dramatic criticism of the day. I have gone to the trouble to send him an essay—"a poor thing, but mine own"—wherein I sought to establish that dramatic criticism was the emptiest and most trivial use to which polished letters could be put. I have intimated to him, insisted even, that criticism cannot make a fine actor of a poor one, nor a poor actor of a fine one, nor can it avail ever to keep either from his just deserts. But, with his superb faculty of always being wrong, my actor-friend holds to another opinion.

And mighty weight does he attach to what he calls

a "good" notice. The phrase "what he calls" is used advisedly, for his concept and meaning of the adjective "good" in this connection are peculiar and unique. "Good," as he understands it, has no reference to the literary qualities of the language in which the notice is couched, nor to the fancy of the writer, nor to the intent of the criticism, nor to its sincerity, nor to its usefulness. What he calls a "good" notice is one that proclaims the subject one of the greatest actors of his time—or, at the very least, one of the most promising; the peer of Irving in all respects, his superior in some; a player in whose hands is safe the future of American comedy, or tragedy, or comic opera —as the case may be. Anything less than that does not come up to his notion of a really "good" notice. I suppose it is because his ideal is so often met with in the dramatic reviews of that day that he will not share my opinion of the value of theatrical criticism.

If my actor-friend were not so prodigally endowed with the gift of being wrong in these matters, I should feel, I confess, somewhat flattered by the apparent zeal with which he invites me to view each new performance of his—and to "stop and have a bit of supper afterward." Although he stoutly holds that no one out of the theatre, no one who hasn't personal contact with grooves and flies and wings and tormentors and back-drops and such things, is qualified to speak authoritatively of the stage, he never fails to send me seats for any new venture in his art—and to bid me "stop and have a bit of supper afterward."

A letter reached me only this evening from his club, "The Sock and Buskin." As only a few nights before I had attended a *première* in which he cut something of a figure, I presumed that the missive was to bid me come again to note a new piece of business he had introduced—kissing the heroine on the brow instead of the lips: a change calculated to "catch the women," as indicating a more delicate and exalted sentiment toward femininity. But the contents of the note were quite otherwise. They warned me against the growing tendency of criticism to occupy itself with the play instead of the players.

"It is a great mistake," my actor-friend defiantly declares, "it is a great mistake—to say nothing of the gross injustice—for the critics to write so much about the plays and so little about the players. Articles that scant notice of the actors lose interest. The public"—I knew before I got that far that he would have something to say about "the public"—"the public like to read about their favorites; they want to know where they are and what they are playing in. And then the actors themselves—what interest can they have in articles that don't deal with their individual work? I tell you it's a great mistake, old man. I can give you a little tip, from what I see here at 'The Sock and Buskin,' that every time you make mention of an actor he goes to the nearest newsstand and buys the paper—particularly if it is a good notice." My correspondent goes on to prove his assertion regarding the gross injustice of the growing tendency to consider

the dramatist more seriously than his puppets. "What would any play be," he asks with no little reason, "without actors? What would Shakespeare be without actors?" Of course, to that one is tempted to reply: still Shakespeare. As a final argument—the cognoscenti have already guessed it—my actor-friend holds up dear old Hazlitt and Hunt and Lamb. Did they not prefer to write of the actors instead of the plays? And why should not moderns who follow the same trade take lessons from their example? That is a very difficult question to answer; but it is possible that in the time of those worthies there were fewer plays and more actors, and that in these days the conditions have reversed. Or, perhaps, we surpass our forebears in nice understanding of the two values.

Mummer-worship—the ridiculous cult that has worked such disaster to dramatic art in this country—has just begun to discover its shams and presumptions. We are coming to know that the essential element of charm and delight in a theatrical performance lies not in the personal fascination of the actor, nor even in his professional attainments; that the font and origin of scenic delectation is the medium of the actor's exhibition. "The play's the thing."

Stay your irritation at the triteness of the quotation. For all its age, use and high authority, its truth is just coming home to us; we are only now taking in its significance. It is old as the hills—the Greeks realized it nearly five hundred years before the Christian era. That is why Aristophanes and Sophocles wrote dramas

that will live to the end of time. The Romans understood it almost as quickly, and the comedies of Plautus and Terentius Afer stand to-day models of form and wit. Recognition of the truth has given France the most splendid dramatic literature among moderns. England felt the truth even before Shakespeare crystallized it into an aphorism. Marlowe's craft and poesy attest it. There came a time when the English lost sight of the honest religion of the theatre and bowed to the Isis and the Osiris of the mummer cult. But some time since the truth came back to them, and a Pinero followed in the reawakening.

We here and now are only starting from the æsthetic superstition and fanaticism—ignorance is such an ugly word—that have left us in all the hundred years of our national existence without one single play of genuine and lasting worth. Without one play that even remotely resembles a classic—using that word simply in its primary significance.

The awakening is recent, very recent indeed. It is only yesterday that we have seen a play of soul and significance condemned because the chief actor employed in its presentation appeared in a rôle "unsympathetic"—that is the cant word—to his admirers. Another narrowly escaped popular disfavor, despite its brilliance of dialogue, interest of story and distinct intention, for no other reason than that the community was not quite certain that it fancied the star actor—a player of modish and debonair affiliations—in a serious rôle. "The Second Mrs.

Tanqueray"—one of the few really great plays of the generation, a play of the finest morality, teaching the wholesome lesson that a man must not marry his mistress—was derided and contemned because an actress who made the blunder of trading on her matronly virtues impersonated an " unsympathetic " character.

No, we have not as yet advanced very far on the way that politer civilizations have pointed out to us; but a beginning is much in these matters. Though we have taken but a step in advance, we have already left behind much of that silly adoration that was content with the most arrant inadequacy of the playwright if only he gave a popular player opportunity to show himself in lights satisfactory to his own vanity and to the simple, uneducated prejudices of his clientage.

Now we know—thanks to the long-delayed release from the priests of the false cult that dulled our senses and corrupted our tastes—that the performer, be he of quality never so rare, is but a subordinate detail in any ensemble of effectiveness. By his attributes and acquirements he may illuminate the inherent beauty of a scenic composition, but that beauty he can neither create nor give to it even a semblance of actuality or vitality if it is wanting in the entity itself. The play's the thing—first, last, and all the time.

The effect of the revolution in the sentiment of the theatre-going public will in the end result beneficently to the actor as well as to the playwright. The former, of course, will stubbornly resist any decadence of the

worship that has hitherto allowed him to roll into fame and fortune like a little tin god on wheels. The extent to which a popular actor exaggerates his own importance is probably not known to the general. There are "stars" even yet, I fancy, who in their negotiations with managers refuse point-blank to state the plays in which they propose to appear, contending that it is themselves the public comes to see and not the plays. Then, too, it is the custom of many of these stuffed idols to put the most awkward and unalluring titles upon the mediums of their theatric display, in order that the public mention may divert therefrom to the name of the actor himself! It is argued, with the keen, quick sense of vanity and egotism, that the common speech will more readily and more naturally pronounce the familiar name of the player than the strange and halting term of the play.

Of course in the new order of things all this hocus-pocus of the Mummer-Isis must cease. His shams and presumptions unveiled, his real subordination in the cult of the theatre discovered, he must perforce strive to keep pace with the quickened sensibilities of his erstwhile worshipers. To maintain any part of their respect, to say nothing of their adoration, he must give over his crude artifice and hackneyed affectations for sincere art. To several popular players I believe that a realization of this recently obtrusive truth has already come home, with a result that the public is now enjoying some excellent plays that would but a little while ago have been deemed unnecessary

acknowledgments of the actor's limited capacity and ephemeral charm.

But it is with the effect wrought in the literature of the stage by this passing of the Mummer-Isis that we are chiefly concerned. And that is because the theatre plays a much more portentous part in the ethical and æsthetical life of the community than is commonly understood. In all exquisitely organized civilizations the power, for good and bad, of the public entertainment has been fully appreciated, and, accordingly, has been a matter of more or less jealous supervision on the part of the state.

It is not likely that the native drama, freed from the impositions of a silly cult, will instantly spring forth in the glorious blossoms that adorn the stage of European countries. But the way having been partially cleared, the chances for the efflorescence are infinitely improved. It is a consolation to know that in England the dissipation of the dulling superstitions that clung about Mummer-worship quickly disclosed the presence in the community of several playwrights of great worth. It is a very few years since a British essayist, railing against just such conditions as those that began but yesterday to pass from us, pointed out that "this age, being one chiefly concerned with facile amusement and parade, reverences the actor above all other beings and by some prodigy that cannot be explained has succeeded in abstracting him from the playwright, upon whom he should feed in the manner of a parasite." It is but a little while since the Eng-

lishman noted this absurdity; but within that brief period we have seen the passing of the mummer-cult, and in its wake have come dramatists fit to vie with those of any age in the daring, skill and finish of their work.

It were fatuous, perhaps, to hope for any such prompt response on the part of the talent doubtless latent in our own soil. We are distinctly inferior to the English in culture. The poverty of the nation in statesmen, scholars, novelists, painters and poets of the first class is no more conclusive of that fact than the utter dearth of considerable dramatists. There must come an uplifting of the tone of the national life, as well as more sweetness and light in the everyday life of the people, before one can confidently expect a brood of playwrights to match those of England or France or Germany, Italy, Spain. Or rather will the appearance of such be simultaneous with the other episode, partaking at once, as it does, of the character of cause and consequence.

In the passing of the Mummer-Isis, in the decadence of a cult possible only in circumstances of ignorance, carelessness and vulgarity, inheres a sign of the betterment of the general taste and morals that means a nobler drama as well as a purification of other features of communal intelligence and ethics. The exaltation of the puppet over the wit and ingenuity that give him the semblance of vitality was an exponent of conditions that, happily, are passing. The clown, the ape, has had his day. The stage is cleared for the poet.

A Cabal against the Zeitgeist

A Cabal against the Zeitgeist

FOR quite two lustrums—or three—criticism and curiosity have hunted here, there and everywhere, for the first cause of the drama's downfall. Laborious research, ingenious guesses, have alike failed to clear the mystery of the degradation into which the native stage has fallen in the matter of its literature. Unhappily, precedent was wanting to turn seekers after the truth in the direction where lay the solution of the riddle. For never before, within the memory of records, has the theatre consorted with such loose and riggish letters as in these days. And just when the conditions had become so desperate as to defy and almost forbid further concern in the affair, just when we had all despaired of ever knowing why so few really great plays of native authorship were presented on the American stage, out steps an actor—"late of Mr. Booth's Company," in the language of his heralds—with that momentous discovery: so simple and obvious and incontrovertible that we are lost in wonder that no one ever hit upon it before. In a jiffy, apparently with no more ado than he would announce the significance of the *ei* on the Delphic sanctuary, the player tells the secret to a long-confounded world.

The managers—to think we should never have di-

vined it or guessed it!—it is they who have lured Thalia from the path of dramatic purity and brought her to the gutter. That is the actor's discovery and one so big with consequence that only the music and majesty of verse can fitly celebrate it. And not only have these ruthless libertines made of Thalia a trull, but with cruelty incomprehensible they strive, combine and conspire to prevent her reformation. That the mummer proves. And even if he didn't, his mere say-so would be convincing to me, in view of his "experience of more than fifteen years in the calling of an actor."

I will not attempt to retrace the course of arguments and instances that lead straight to this conviction of the managers; for at every step I should be lost in wonder—and so should the reader—that this mighty discovery was so long delayed.

For, I reiterate, now that someone has disclosed the heart of the subject, we can only amaze that the managers have so long contrived to conceal their hideous assault upon the native drama. Surely we must have been very stupid not to suspect the actual fact in the case—not to realize that there are among us a plenty of men peers or superiors of England's Pinero, Shaw and Jones and Hope—immediate modernity supplies the instances—of France's Rostand, Donnay, Coppée and Porto-Riche; of Germany's and Austria's Sudermann, Fulda and Hauptmann; of Norway's Ibsen, Italy's Giacosa, Belgium's Maeterlinck, and Russia's Ostrovsky. Is it reasonable that to every

other country under the enlightening sun chance or culture should give such dramatists as these and yet deny to us dramatic talent of even approximate rank? Why in the school of nations should we alone wear the fool's cap? There would need be something radically wrong in our whole national make-up to damn us justly to such exclusive shame as the managers have put upon our stage.

What an ingenious lot they must be, though, to have kept up so long and so convincingly the specious excuse for their failure to produce great plays of American authorship! What energy and cunning—yes, what deviltry—must be involved in this silent, subtle, secret cabal against the native dramatist! One can almost admire the marvelous exercise of will and of wit in the evil work. To nip all the fine talent that for years must have been swelling to burst into bloom —to keep from the boards all the products of innate aptitude and thumb-touch artistry that must be awaiting exposition—to sit down, effectively, on the *Zeitgeist*—in short, to choke off the Genius of the Generation—think you, good reader, what the managers must be and what they must do to accomplish all this. Wonder-fellows, I say. Perhaps it is not so remarkable after all that no one anticipated the actor's discovery of their plot. In the entire range of our history and development in the arts and letters there is nothing comparable with the conspiracy of those six or eight men over there on Broadway to slam the door of the theatre in the face of the American

Drama and keep her out forever in the cruel oblivion of night. She should be a queen raised aloft on the golden throne of popular favor, radiant with the jewels of poetry and soul, secure in the sovereignty of universal adoration. Instead, the managers have made of her a bedraggled light-o'-love, a creature of the quay-side, the frolic of the slums. The pen scrambles about in vain for similes and tropes wherewith fitly to describe the malice and cunning of this cabal against the talent of the land. There is nothing to which to liken it. Nothing—unless it be the secret understanding among American publishers not to print great novels and poems of American authorship; or the equally notorious intrigue of our art-museums and park-committees to prevent the display of the many inspired statues and memorials that crowd the work-rooms of native-born and native-bred sculptors.

This is not the time and place to discuss the diabolic schemes and intricate methods by which the managers have succeeded in their suppression of the great lights that fate destined for the illumination of the American theatre. The purpose of these words being merely to celebrate the discovery and, in a shy way, to assist in the enterprise of reform—it is sufficient for us to realize that the managers have succeeded, and that, too, against forces and conditions whose obvious virtue and potency raise the fiendish achievement to the interest and dignity of the world's eighth wonder.

The drama, of all the departments of art, has always been the most sensitive to actual environment; the

quickest to feel what is in the air; the readiest and most eager to conform to the mold of the public mind, to take on the complexion of the general morals and customs of the moment. To say that it is a reflex of the living manners is to utter triteness. It is no reproach to the Attic dramatists—as some scholar lately declared it—no reproach to their skill as effective playwrights, nor to their sense of the intimate personal quality of the stage, that their models were epopee and the friezes of the Parthenon. What more significant of the stately march and statuesque cast of the Grecian mind than the lines of Homer and the figures of Phidias? In fashioning their compositions upon such models the Greek playwrights but followed, unconsciously doubtless, the first and essential law of their art; they held the mirror up to nature, and it was a nature that imitated Olympus. No; the Attic dramatists but reflected the men and deeds and thought of their time. This the stage has done always and everywhere when left free to natural expression. The painter, the sculptor, the poet, the musician, may live in the future, or in the past, or in the clouds. But the dramatist lives always in the present and squarely on the earth. And it is that fact, proved by example as well as philosophy, that convicts those six or eight managers over there on Broadway of the actor's charge.

All the conditions and circumstances of life here and now point unmistakably to the existence of a grand national drama. The stage, as we have seen, is the

most significant, characteristic and distinctive art-form of a nation's conduct—spiritual, intellectual and material. Does it not follow then, as surely as night follows day, that somewhere in this vast country there are lurking splendid scenic creations inspired by the purity of our politics, the exalted ideals of our most conspicuous society, the gentleness and profundity of our daily press, the universal respect for learning, the indifference of the general community to the merely material? In view of the drama's sensitiveness to the ambient hour, in view of its irrepressible and almost spontaneous information of the sentiments, actions, customs of the moment, who can doubt that our stage is as rich in passion, poetry, grace and truth as that of the most polite and upright of nations?

Regard the ferocity and finality with which we dispose of knaves who taint our civic institutions with bribery, perjury, ballot-frauds and such other menaces against the sanctity of the state. Recall our perpetual ostracism of officials who shared the earnings of Cypria and the loot of crime. Does one see anywhere in the government of city, county or commonwealth any man whom general repute or specific proof has proclaimed vicious, dishonest, dangerous to the integrity of the laws and to the public morals?

It were impossible that such stubborn probity, such jealous care of communal dignities, should fail to seek and to find æsthetic expression in the magic glass that every generation sets up for its own introspection and delectation. And so, beyond a doubt, there are at this

moment plays among us, unacted, unread, disregarded, that would stir the national heart, inflame the fever of patriotism to the destruction of every vicious influence and malefic potency that may be skulking in our political existence. It is related that whenever the powers at Athens deemed the people to be growing chill and careless in their civic obligations and national spirit they arranged a production of the "Persæ" of Æschylus. And when the Athenians went forth from the presentation of that odic drama they sobbed and wept and embraced one another, and ran like beings bereft through the streets, uttering lamentations. And all the night they thronged before the temple,—men, women and children—beating now their breasts and now the shields that hung on the doors of the shrine, and crying, between their sobs, Athens, Athens, Athens! Woe, at such a time, to any man who dared stand out as Tyrant, and double woe to any set of men who dared trifle with the honor and rights of Hellas!

How long, think you, should we hear of "Bosses" and "trusts" and "soulless corporations," and legislation-briberies, and foreign slight of Chicago beef, if we had such plays as "Persæ"? The academic groves that skirted the Grecian capital were fertile of such dramas, and for my own part I believe that here, too, the woods are full of them. Only, the managers won't produce them.

No more will they produce any of the chaste, yet brilliant, comedies, that must grow out of the condition of modern modishness. It were possible, perhaps,

for the stage to prove insensate to such civic influences as we have just considered; but to fancy Thalia irresponsive to the fascinations of contemporary society—that strains imagination beyond endurance. The wit and learning of fashion in these days have, perhaps, never been equaled in the domain of elaborate leisure. There is, too, a peculiar mingling of splendor and severity, of tripping speech and precise rhetoric, of sparkling utterance and profound thought—at once a majesty and an ease of manner singularly ready to the uses of the stage. Whatever may be the faults of the age in other details, surely no reasonable man will deny the exhilaration, the inspiration of modern society. Unaffected, picturesque, idyllic, frolicsome, gracious, and free; polite, philosophic, profound; modest without prudery, scornful of vulgar display; despising the accident of fortune, the trumpery of titles—how were it possible that such qualities should fail of exact reflection in the theatre?

The fact that we do not see these scenic expressions of the manners and thoughts and morals of the day should not weaken one's faith in their actuality. It is simply that the managers will not present them. Those six or eight unconscionable fellows over there on Broadway, those banded rebels against the *Zeitgeist*, the Genius of the Generation, can, indeed, prevent the public view of the masterpieces. But with all their cunning and will they cannot prevent their existence.

From whatever point of view one surveys the situation, no matter how closely one peers into the pros-

pect, it is obvious that all the circumstances of existence here and now tend to the creation of a superb and exalted national drama. Tend, in truth, is not the word—rather, they compel, insist upon, the production of plays that in nobility of conception, dignity of theme, refinement of form and general perfection of style, shall stand on a plane with the prevailing character and conduct of the hour.

Just where these plays are hidden I do not pretend to know. Neither does the actor. But the managers know. And that is the dreadful, hopeless infamy of it all. Every one of those six or eight Machiavellis over there on Broadway could put his hand this moment on plays by American authors as admirable, masterly, as the best of the scenic products of England, France, Germany, Austria, Spain, Belgium, Italy, Norway.

If you ask me why they thus stand out against the genius ready to their purposes and business, or why they plot and intrigue against the talent of the soil, I reply promptly that I do not know. Neither does he who proclaims the plot. They themselves, perhaps, could not fully explain the reasons of their conduct in this affair; probably no one on earth could. Satan might.

But we need not despair of finding a way to outwit these cunning varlets. There is one resource, one remedy. It lies with the public. Or, to go farther, to the quickest quick of the matter, it lies with the masses—a body very much more powerful and con-

clusive than the public, which, between you and me, dear reader, is a rather chill and indifferent institution. Yes, the masses—that is the engine that must be turned against the managers. Let the people throughout the entire length and breadth of the land abstain from attending the theatre until the managers present for their judgment plays of the first class by American authors. Nor would it be in the least degree difficult to arouse the masses to this drastic and wholesome course of action. Let the matter be agitated for a fortnight or a month by two or three of those famous molders of public opinion, the "great dailies"—and the business is done. They have only to devote to the cause some part of those illuminated sheets with which they disfigure the Sabbath, and the army of theatre-goers will dwindle in a twinkling into a corporal's guard.

This, I am certain, would do marvels in reforming the evil. Let the chief and sole agents of the existing wrongs be shown in the most decisive way in the world that the theatres may not hope for patronage until the native dramatists—the Scribes and Sardous and Dumas, the Sheridans, Gilberts and Pineros, the Schillers, Sudermanns and Ibsens, the Rostands and Echegarays whose presence in the community is a foregone conclusion—are given not only a chance, but a certainty. And when once the managers have put on the boards plays by American authors like "Honor," "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," "Trelawny of the Wells," "The Prisoner of Zenda," "The Devil's

Disciple," "Madame Sans-Gène," "Cyrano de Bergarac," to cite at random—then, and not till then, let the masses resume their places in the boxes and parquet of the playhouse and restore to the managers the patronage without which they cannot survive. It may perhaps take some time to bring the lesson fully home to the managers' bosoms—some months, or even one or two years—but in the end the device will work its purpose. Of course, in the meantime some form of amusement must be provided, temporarily, for the masses, and I would submit, simply in the way of suggestion, that we go back for a season to some of the sweeter, simpler forms of general diversion—pig-sticking or bull-baiting or something of that sort.

The White Sow in the Theatre

The White Sow in the Theatre

A Suggestion from the Tenth Book of the Odyssey

εἶσεν δ' εἰσαγαγοῦσα κατὰ κλισμούς τε θρόνους τε·
ἐν δέ σφιν τυρόν τε καὶ ἄλφιτα καὶ μέλι χλωρὸν
οἴνῳ Πραμνείῳ ἐκύκα· ἀνέμισγε δὲ σίτῳ
φάρμακα λύγρ', ἵνα πάγχυ λαθοίατο πατρίδος αἴης.
αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ δῶκέν τε καὶ ἔκπιον, αὐτίκ' ἔπειτα
ῥάβδῳ πεπληγυῖα, κατὰ συφεοῖσιν ἔέργνυ.
οἱ δὲ συῶν μὲν ἔχον κεφαλάς, φωνήν τε τρίχας τε,
καὶ δέμας, αὐτὰρ νοῦς ἦν ἔμπεδος, ὡς τὸ πάρος περ.
ὣς οἱ μὲν κλαίοντες ἐέρχατο· τοῖσι δὲ Κίρκη
παρ' ἄκυλον βάλανόν τ' ἔβαλεν, καρπόν τε κρανείης,
ἔδμεναι, οἷα σύες χαμαιευνάδες αἰὲν ἔδουσιν.

—ΟΔΥΣΣΕΙΑΣ Κ.

"Exhort her to swear a great oath of the blessed gods," they warned Ulysses when he went up from ship to Circe's palace where his captains and mates, transformed to swine, wallowed in congenial mud, "exhort her to swear a great oath that she will not plan any other dire harm for thee, nor make thee naked, weak and unmanly." Such an oath might this hour exact from the raddled deity of the scene-realm ere her own licenses and the public encouragement destroy what charms there yet may be against her vicious magic.

All the story of the current rage of smut in the theatre lies, in antique allegory, between those lines of

Homer wherein he tells the undoing of heroes in sensuous Ææa. The tricks and stratagems of Circe now are Thalia's. The amazing perversion they have wrought in the taste of the people, in the ancient regard for pudicity in speech and deed of the stage, is no more of prodigy than was the wand-wave that turned Ulysses' sailors into swine. For the sweets and spices, "mixed with pale honey and Pramnian wine," wherewith the voluptuary beguiled the strangers, one has but to read "The Turtle," "Zaza," "Mlle. Fifi," "The Conquerors," "An Affair of Honor," "The Christian," "The Cuckoo," and all the other applauded veneries of recent vogue. The betel and lotus with which Circe savored the feasting—"that they might altogether forget their paternal land"—may have been more instant in their potency than the ribald word, the lickerish theme, the libidinous dance and paphian posturing of these later devices; but they were no surer in their sorcery of soul and senses. And left to work out their end, if not their intention, they will yet surpass the marvel of the siren's contrivance that gave "the heads, and voice, and hairs, and body of swine" to men panoplied in Olympian purple. The fare that Circe threw to Ulysses' mates, "such things as ground-wallowing swine always eat," is not other in essence and effect than that with which the stage of the hour allures greatest frequence and longest report.

If I have not been deterred from employment of the Homeric simile by the brutal candor of its terms, it is because its tropical pertinence has so profoundly im-

pressed me. The wantonness of the public in the matter of stage amusement, the quick wit and boldness with which the theatre of the day panders to salacious caprice, the flaunting prosperity of dramatic pornography, and, above all, the certainty of the consequent ruin to the stage and society have long seemed to me writ in vivid trope in the tale of Circe's styes. For in the halls of Thespis, as in the palace of Perse's daughter, the White Sow is supreme. The one masked her subtle wooing with irresistible song and went clad in robes of sparkling witchery—"such as are the filmy, graceful, lustrous webs of goddesses." The other lures in a falsetto of specious wit, covers her ugly form with trappings of tinsel, and coquettes with assault from behind a gimcrack shield of sham Art and Realism. But the spirit of both is uncleanness. And it found voice when Circe touched Ulysses with her wonder-rod and bade him: "Go now to the stye—lie with thine other companions."

To such as may have forgotten the ancient legend, it might be well to recall that when the queen of the carnal isle had done with the hero she sent him to the infernal regions. There may be a hint in that of use to modern playgoers. It was no farther to Hades from Ææa than it is from here. But once brought there by the porcine fairy, there will be no blind Theban to show the way back; and no such paltry sacrifice as a barren heifer and a coal-black ram will secure safe return, as it did for Ulysses and his mates.

It almost needs language of classic authority to sign the conditions that beset the theatre in this last year of the century. The inordinate favor of defiant viciousness is one of the most amazing phenomena of the time. Indeed, it would stand quite by itself, but for the similarly astounding token of a relaxed public-conscience that tolerates the gun-sweep of far-off islanders in the interests of increased trade in American calicoes and bottled-beer. There is certainly nothing comparable to it in the entire experience of our playhouses. What few timid advances were made in the past in the direction of scenic bawdry had place in resorts of acknowledged disrepute. And in every instance they were repressed through the agency alike of the police and of public opinion the moment they reached for the general notice. In fact, so thorough was the check put upon indecorous exhibitions that theatres where they uncovered themselves were deprived of their licenses and forced to close their doors. They were the exclusive rendezvous of the hopeless, the reckless, and of yokels bent on urban dissipation. To men and women of the caste that now countenance spectacles of smut, these gilded stews were known only by the vaguest hearsay. Now and then it happened that some reputable playhouse exposed its company in equivoke of dress and speech; but the event, instead of the present matter-of-course acceptance, became sensation and scandal. So that even to this day such comparatively mild audacities as "The Black Crook," "Pink Dominos" and "Forbidden Fruit" remain

lively memories that are frequently paraded to excuse, by precedent, the current favor of theatric impudence.

They who cite these sparse instances ignore the facts of their rarity and the wholly different nature of their circumstances and general regard. It is the tumultuous increase in the number of such schemes of entertainment and, more than aught else, their insidious tyranny over stage and people that startles and puzzles. What was once a spasm of disturbance has become a chronic riot. Plays and spectacles that only a few years ago would have been deemed game for "slumming parties" are now proclaimed fit refreshment for the young and unsophisticated. Raciness formerly content with equivocality now flings its meaning straight at the audience. The stage used to call a spade a spade, but now it must add oaths and curses to round out the effect. Profanity has gone out of fashion everywhere except in barrooms and fashionable theatres. Advoutry and seduction are not subjects of drawing-room conversation except in the drawing-rooms of modish playhouses. The problem-piece that only yesterday was the medium of sociologic ideas has been turned to the showman's purposes and made the excuse for public presentation of flamboyant trollops. Episodes of unspeakable perversity are cut out of "Zaza," and the multitude is then cozened into the notion that that play of the brothel points a whelming moral! Those who protest against the shameless effrontery of "The Turtle," "Mlle. Fifi" and the like are met with the lilting device of a famous

order. It often occurs to me that the world would have lost nothing if the Countess of Salisbury had had her garter properly fastened when King Edward led her out to dance on that memorable occasion at Windsor. The errant bit of blue ribbon has been responsible, I fear, for much masquerading of viciousness. The gallant words with which His Majesty silenced the tittering courtiers and paled his partner's blushes have always stood a ready defense for shrewd audacity of evil intent. They are the familiar trap that practiced sin sets for innocence. At the first sign of trepidation, *Honi soit* jumps out to rebuke misgiving and encourage advance.

Even religion is made to serve the scheme of pruriency—and of a Hall Caine. Under cover of Biblical quotations put into the mouth of a hepatic mummer, he is nerved to show the mysteries of a concert-hall, with its fascinations of wine, cards, "kept women" and palsied rakes. Evil that enters the theatre in sanctimonious garb is always the hardest to fight. Such a play as "The Christian" is vastly more vicious in its effects than one of "The Turtle's" frank immodesty. It not only panders to hypocrisy, it betrays innocence. It symbols the prowess of the White Sow in its most pawky cunning.

Almost as ingenious is the subterfuge of Art by which the theatre exploits indecency under the mask of literary skill and the crafts of Realism. Out of that machine have come some of the most pernicious *dei* of current sensation: plays that exalt lust into love and

confuse bestiality with humanity. Devices that parade the modes and sentiments of the bagnio, the turgid trade of harlotry, the marvels of perversity. And the defense of these transcripts from life in the fens and sumps of society is alleged to lie in the skill of their illumination and in their thumb-touch elaboration.

It is the same excuse that pretends to justify the picture of a naked woman on the score of quick flesh-tints and vraisemblant curves. It is the specious plea that evil may be art if it be well enough done. As if some things were not all the worse for being well done! Tolstoï worked for fifteen years pondering and collating the opinions of two centuries on the subject of æsthetics, and in the end he came to banish from the realm of Art everything that did not aim at moral perfection. Deftness of construction, ingenuity of selection, polish of speech no more justify plays inherently vicious and lush in shameless knowledge than the lauded style and rich Saxon palliate Lord Rochester's Letters. Their pretension to place in the art of the theatre is not more valid than that of the "split-dancer." The mantle of technical and literary skill may be never so delusive, but tear it aside and you find the White Sow.

There is a curious delusion abroad that these plays of passionate discovery make quickest and surest appeal to women. And as these form the initiative and conclusive element in theatrical frequence, their fancies are most studiously courted with devices supposed to catch and hold feminine sympathy. The

notion—so dear to callowness and senility—that every woman is a rake at heart, has probably done much to encourage this procedure. It has happened, too, that women writers have been among the most eager and ardent celebrators of the abnormal heroines fashioned after Perse's daughter. Such literally rush into print with shrill defense of characters that the coarser masculine mind finds unrelievedly nasty. The most obvious qualities they assert to be beyond the cordial and intellectual grasp of mere males. "Men can't understand such a woman as Zaza"—how often one has heard that! And the same of *Magda*, *Paula Tanqueray*, *Mrs. Ebbsmith*, *Claudine Rozay*, *Césarine*, *Emma Scarli*, and the rest of the favorites in the scenic seraglio whose torrid love-affairs the playwrights have sought to cool into a comfortable halo. After every fresh exploitation of one or another of these glorified hetairas, the "woman's page" of newspaper and magazine gushes psychology in explanation of what is lucidly explained only by pathology. "These are women's women," is the burden of the cry, when in point of fact they are distinctly men's women. Their place in the comic tragedies that their spangled careers inspire prove that beyond question. The prentense that these shapely and well-kept animals into whom the spirit of Circe has breathed the temper of the White Sow reflect the feelings and sentiment of womankind, is simply a monstrous impertience. It may hold good for a certain class of muliebrity. The expert wits that fashion these dramas of sexual tur-

moil undoubtedly select typical characteristics to illuminate their heroines. But that these abnormal figures sign the generality of femininity is a silly presumption. Granting that men cannot understand such a woman as *Zaza*, for instance—though as a matter of fact she is a very easy proposition—one may go further and add that neither is she understood of women: that is, women of the blessed average.

Effeminate men and mannish women have thrown so many sounding aphorisms and empty proverbs about femininity that almost any kind of nonsense regarding the sex finds credence. So the dramatist and manager and press-agent and woman writer who set up some sputtering fagot as an incarnation of the essence of the sex, may draw the deluded multitude to the view, particulary if they place her in her habitual ambiency of champagne, prodigal bucks and the morphine-needle. But do not expect us to believe that the central figure of such circumstances compels the understanding and sympathy of "those others" whom she customarily vilifies and rails at. Such a creature as *Zaza*, I maintain, is an utter mystery to the average woman of everyday life and a nauseous disgust as well. Women, in the vast, uncountable majority, can have no comprehension of the thoughts, emotions or behavior of a being that abandons itself to every and any freak of sensuality. Because women in the vast, uncountable majority are pure and innocent, as clean in thought naturally as they are clean in speech customarily. Cynicism—and followers of

erotic literature on stage and book-stall—may jeer at this apparently sophomoric utterance, but its reason will transpire to all men who do not limit feminine companionship to convenient facility. The average woman is even ignorant or, at most, vaguely suspicious, of the viciousness that comes into masculine existence as a matter of course. The teachings of chance or instinct, if such insinuate themselves into her consciousness, she keeps secret even from herself. Whence, then, could come the sympathy with the frank lust and carnal jealousies that the stage pretends to illustrate the sex? It is impossible in nature and in the basilar conditions of society that women of normal make-up, threading decent love, should regard the morbid frenzies, the sickening restiveness of a *Zaza*, a *Tanqueray*, a *Blanche de Chelles*, or the like with any sentiment but that of revulsion. And people do not go to the playhouse to be revolted. There may be women who fly to the quick of *Zaza's* character and who find there sensitive reflex of their own moods and manners. But, in the main, they are women who lead men's lives. There may, too, be a plenty of such to crowd a theatre for months and insure the fortune of these excursions into Paphos; but for all their number they make no valid rule. Luxury and cupidity have not yet worked such havoc in the race. When the heroines of some recent sensational "successes" actually reflect the soul and heart of the women that a loose public opinion and the complacency or doltishness of criticism lead to the

scene of their exposure, the second Deluge will not be far off.

Nor are those behind the baize to be wholly disregarded in the consideration of this matter. There was a time when the vagrom people of the stage, with their free-and-easy manners and patriarchal code of association, were looked upon as perils to the community in which they sojourned and to society at large. The approach of their van and hurdy-gurdy started a crier through the town warning citizens to take in their linens, their poultry and their housemaids. Their mere presence was deemed hurtful to the young and unsuspecting of the village. Even age and wisdom kept glance from the green whereon the gypsy mummers defied the devil with their fire-eating and their farces. Indeed, up to within very recent days the stage was contemned as the font and origin of much of public looseness in behavior and sentiment. But one may fairly question whether these conditions have not lately reversed: whether the masses—the body wrongly construed as the public by some students of the matter—have not corrupted the players and destroyed their normal point of view. Episodes within my own experience incline me to believe that the source of personal demoralization lies in front of the footlights rather than behind. The players, confounded by the apparently sure prosperity that follows immodesty and salacity, imagine themselves driven to pursue the same course. "That's what people want," is their delusive fetich. They point in proof to the

notorious successes of the hour, and putting off the hampers of their own scruples and of counsel, they plunge into the musky pool. The leers and shouts of the onlooking satyrs and the stunned marvel of decent folks they mistake for approval. Until it is genuinely curious to note the stubbornness with which the poor mummer holds to faith in unseemliness.

An actress lately had occasion to show me the "notices" of her performance of a certain rôle in a play that has met with marked frequence in several cities. She was reasonably proud of the press criticisms; many of them gave fervid praise to her skill and her presence. Indeed, most stress was laid upon this latter element in the player's attraction—the suavity of voice, the gentleness of port, the infinitude of politenesses, the aroma of refinement pervading the unfamiliar personality. But just when the appealing creature was to take the last step into critics' fancy, she must needs doff her petticoats and show herself in tights of scarlet! The shock and disappointment of spectator and reviewer discovered themselves clearly. They resented a pretty illusion dispelled. "Aha," wrote one in obvious annoyance, "so that is what the dream-lady had up her sleeve? All the while she was looking at us out of those fathomless eyes and lulling us with the music of her speech, she was plotting that coup of cardinal vulgarity." The variant note of rebuke stood out in almost every pæan that the actress showed me. In place after place of her appearance there had been

the same regretful protest against the incongruous immodesty.

I asked the player why she had persisted in the vain offense of her admirers. There were many reasons, she explained—the part called for the bold costume—the manager ordered it—the public demands that sort of thing.

"But these criticisms—compliments in the main—would seem to disprove that last."

"The critics are not the public," the actress insisted. Managers must cater to the crowd, and the crowd nowadays runs after raciness. Look at 'Zaza,' 'The Christian,' 'The Turtle,' 'The Conquerors,' and all the rest. If an actress will not keep up with the procession she loses her place—and one must live, you know."

So, in her scarlet fleshings and her gauze shoulder-straps, this woman, naturally modest and self-respecting, goes to the end of the season—and the end of her tether!—with the "public," in the argot of the profession, baying at her heels.

Criticism is evidently impotent in the matter. Not only because players are innately hostile to suggested improvement, but chiefly because they like to delude themselves that they are servants of the "public." In a recent presentation at a Broadway theatre an actor employed a revolting piece of "business" night after night, despite the unanimous condemnation of the reviewers. He contended that the "public" evidently enjoyed his grossness because he invariably

"got a laugh." Probably Circe would have excused her transformation of Ulysses' mates into swine on the similar ground that she "got a grunt."

The player, taking the cue from playwright and manager, sometimes shields this ignoble subservience to the mob behind a fustian buckler of Art. An actress, compelled by the exigencies of her profession—I wish to be as gallant as possible in these delicate matters—to cut a large figure—almost her entire figure, in fact—in a certain sensational device that was spun about the gradual discovery of her charms, phantasied a mystic poesy in the conceit. Yes, she found in the author's bold indecency an esoteric beauty, a profound grace of imagination, depths of moral teaching that quite justified the sacrilege of her talents. Really touching were her complainings that the public and the critics saw only the nastiness of the author's daring and remained insensate to his artistic intention. To catalogue the succession of libidinous speeches and outrageous episodes would not shatter her dream. She could but sigh at such dullness of soul and lack of sympathy. Soothed by the easy lotus of her own fancy, she nightly confronted a task that otherwise would have revolted her good taste and her gentle womanhood. She had apparently brought herself to believe that she was a martyr to Art. And to such rhapsody of devotion did she exhilarate herself that each night before entering upon her astounding scene she paused in the wings to utter a brief prayer to the Deity. Being of a religious turn of mind, that seemed the readiest security against

the contamination of the thronged stalls. Often when on the stage and subjected to the ribald comments and blunt insults of the ruder elements in the audience, she has found strength to continue the act—one of the most "successful," by the way, of recent years—only by a fresh appeal for Divine guidance. Meanwhile, of course, the box-office flourished and her salary grew.

But what can be the ultimate fate of a "public" that dooms a woman, an earnest and skilled entertainer, to such violences against her ethics and æsthetics? If the deed is less brutal than that of the ancients who threw naked maids to hungry lions, tigers and leopards, the difference is not more than a hair's-breadth. The thought of a proud soul tortured and delicacy bared to the buff—save for the veiling of cambric and Valenciennes—to make holiday for a typical metropolitan audience, makes one doubt the validity of our civilization.

Perhaps, though, no one has rightful concern with the effect on the individual of these libidinous enterprises. The principle of personal liberty—the dominant note in the jangle of modern society—would seem to forbid it. Besides, it is only fair to admit that there are many persons who cannot be hurt by viewing any sort of stage salacity, from the nudity of "An Affair of Honor" to that of the play by MM. Simon and Berton. They are the immunes. They stand beyond the danger; either far above it or far beneath it. Generally it is the latter. More, the undoing of the individual separate from either of these classes, might be

regarded with indifference, if the evil stopped there. But society cannot regard lightly the general demoralization that must result from the unbridled license that has lately seized the stage. The world has no time to concern itself with the salvation of this or that mote in the communal body, but with the threatened contamination of the core it must occupy itself, if from no nobler motive than that of self-preservation. That is the basis of all law. Even though it be true that a multitude find drooling enjoyment in plays of candid smut and of carnality shamming concealment in art or religion, the rights and duties of the state are but the clearer. For with all its deference to personal liberty, society does provide for the safety of the weak, for the guidance of the evil-inclined, as well as for the suppression of the brazenly corrupt. Such philanthropic provisions are the laws against gambling, against the social evil, against opium-smoking, against intoxication. Persons who profit by these and cognate vices might reasonably advance the plea put forth by their apparent superiors in the theatre: if there were no demand there would be no supply. And the plea would be no more absurd in the one instance than in the other. Society arrogates to itself the control of the individual, not from an unselfish concern in the welfare of that particular individual, but because the individual is an element in the general entirety, and because the corruption of that individual is liable to taint the body of which it is a component. When such an institution as the theatre, with it traditional allurements, its re-

freshment of beauty, music and joyous company, be comes another Ææa, filled with the tricks and stratagems that made worse than monkeys of Ulysses' mates, the matter obviously turns into an affair of state.

It is some solace to reflect that scarcely one of the unwholesome contrivances that have come into vogue here is of native origin. They have all, without one noteworthy exception, been sent to us in ships, along with the much less harmful riff-raff of the steerage. Regard, too, that the vilest of them all are the contributions of France. And if one questions what effects may attend unbridled lubricity in the theatre let him glance at the career of a nation that surpasses all moderns in brutish massacres, in scandals of government, in ingenuity of vice, and one whose population decreases with horrible steadiness and certainty.

"Cyrano de Bergerac" and Its Lesson in Suggestion

"Cyrano de Bergerac" and Its Lesson in Suggestion

THE servants of a certain potentate of the theatre were lately ordered to proclaim the vanity of dramatic criticism and its worthlessness. From the sanctum of their subtle master they were hurried to their desks to write decrials of an institution that at times menaced his adventures. In a veritable inspiration of shrewdness this chief of enterprisers resolved to undo in a moment a scheme that, be its weaknesses what may, has endured for twenty centuries. With a leg that figuratively and in influence reaches from upper Broadway to Park Row, he would kick over a temple founded by the best wits of Athens and Rome, winged and towered by the nicest tastes of England's literature, sculptured and colored by the Gallic adepts of dramatic criticism.

To the canny iconoclast the ancient dignities and modern refinements of the institution were not awesome; his cheap command of the fakirs that have invaded the shrine naturally prompted irreverence.

So he bade them write themselves down for asses and to further condemn the really faithful prophets of their cult as impudent posers, or, at best, self-deluded pretenders. In any event he willed an end of critics and criticism. They made him tired.

"The public is the best judge, the only judge," he shouted with a wink to his brother managers—as the crew of satellites and parasites trooped out of his presence to their appointed task. Henceforth he would take no account of what professional critics said of his plays or players; he put his trust, all his trust, in the dear public. They alone, the mass of possible patrons, had the qualities of intelligence, taste and cultivation to pronounce conclusively on the merits of a scenic contrivance!

Was there ever such another discovery of consummate ingenuity? In his office up on Broadway, that archmagistrate of management has undoubtedly been studying the arcana of mental science. He has learned the prowess of Suggestion. He has taken the tip from Hamilton, Berkeley, Charot. Possibly Melancthon, or even Tertullian and St. Augustin first imbued him with a realization of what may be done by insinuating a conviction through the impulse of trust.

The purpose is obvious—be the prime agency what it may. And the event may well bear watching.

By flattery of the public, in the delicate manner indicated, theatrical management calculates to prompt a general disregard, or even contempt, for the opinion of trained criticism, for the judgment of wholesome taste and polite sentiment and sound intelligence.

The appeal to the public is a play to the gallery.

Once get the public to fancy that it is, and of a right ought to be, independent of dramatic criticism, superior to it, indeed—the managers quite wisely argue—and

you have removed a high-railed bar to uninterrupted prosperity. Wean the crowd from confidence in the judgment and utterances of the approved arbiters of the stage, and your way is clear to the exploitation of whatever is likely to pander to the baser moods of humanity. Persuade the crowd to despise the men who set themselves up as mentors in the drama, heralds of the muses, guides to the ways of sweetness and light, and the theatre will be as easy of conduct as the brothel or the taproom: as certain of profit and as ready of wares.

Therefore "jolly" the public! Tell them over and over again and again that they are braver, wiser, cleverer, keener, truer than the critics. That their minds are less biased, their emotions more lively, their imaginations richer in fancy, their tastes more honest, their hearts less dulled by custom and compulsion. Tell them this often enough and strenuously enough—the magnate said to his servants in Park Row and in other regions of the world of print—and presently the critics will find their occupation gone. The public will read only the advertisements of plays and players. The once potent columns of reviews will fall to the unimportance of the department of kitchen-recipes. And finally, from the atrophy of neglect, they will dissipate into nothingness.

Surely an ingenious project; one that evinces skill and audacity in its initiators that almost force admiration. Such providence and assurance might work wonders—in a decent cause. And all based, too, on an

understanding of the psychologic marvels possible to Suggestion.

The proved fact that the "public" has shown itself, from time out of memory, to be the worst judge if left entirely to its own initiative and prejudice, only adds to the utter novelty and nerve of the intrigue. That the crowd naturally takes to "living pictures," disrobing scenes, salacious speech and bawdy episode, to smut and barbarity and lubricity, and even stupidity if it be but vulgar enough, did not deter the bold exploitation of the enterprise. Indeed, it rather encouraged to it. "When I see audiences flocking in I know that I've a success," is the way in which the whole matter is summed up in one of the inspired publications on the subject.

"Flocking in." What an unconsciously graphic way of putting it!

But what has this to do with "Cyrano de Bergerac"? the reader interrupts.

Rostand's earlier ventures in the theatre were popular failures. The "public" of whose virtues in the field of criticism we have lately heard so much from managers' servants in Park Row, did not approve his aspirations nor recognize the promise of his "first arms." They sneered at his conceits and hissed his phrases—or would have done so if they had thought it worth while. The managers in Paris might easily have fallen in with this adverse judgment, because they certainly did not see "audiences flocking in."

But there were men with the saint-given faculty of

knowing the truth when they saw it and with the courage to proclaim their discovery, even though they had to repeat it again and again and yet again, to prevail over the sodden indifference of the public. They recognized the god in Rostand and fell down and worshiped all the while the public jeered or marveled. And presently, to justify that adoration, the gods, who are ever mindful of the faithful, breathed all their graces into Edmond Rostand, and he gave to the world the immortal play of "Cyrano de Bergerac."

Left to themselves, the public of here would never have discovered the epochal qualities of the play. No more would an actor or manager have ventured its presentation. But, happily, there are in the community five or six dramatic critics capable of reading "Cyrano de Bergerac" in the French original and qualified to understand its splendors, and sufficiently aloof from the circumstances of vulgarity, venality and cheap complaisance that beset the theatre of vogue to lift their voices in enthusiastic, rhapsodic acclamation of Rostand's work.

Again Suggestion came into play. But this time with event over which all the world of theatre-goers may sing hosannahs of rejoicing. Little by little the insistence of the sparse group of men—who are not the servants of public or managers—started the sluggish appreciations of the professional element of the theatre to notice of Rostand's creation.

Scores and hundreds of objections were hurled against the proposition that "Cyrano de Bergerac" be

presented on the American stage. The Gascon hero would have no cordial significance here—the rhymed Alexandrines would be mortally hurt by translation—the author's preciosity would have no virtue with local amusement patrons—the heroine was unsympathetic in her shallowness and selfishness—the story's tragic ending was fatal to popularity: "People go to the theatre to laugh, to be amused." How often we've heard that!—the myriad unfamiliar allusions would bore the American auditor who knows little of French literature and cares less. The play was, after all, too old-fashioned—simply Hugo brought to perfect crystallization. The lines, while possibly beautiful in the reading, were ill-suited for scenic utterance, etc., etc., etc., ending with the climactic etcetera of Cyrano's nose. The public would never stand for that nose! No, no; the public could not be expected to sympathize with a hero whose nose was the joke of his generation.

But lo! and behold! Before the fire of Rostand's genius every one of these ineffably paltry and wholly imaginary obstacles dissipated as the auroral mists melt into the first burst of sun. The audience, made receptive by that precious Suggestion of which I have spoken, drank in every line, every word of sentiment so noble, speech so splendid that even the brutal carelessness or ignorance of the actor's mumbling and mouthing could not undo the author's will. And the multitude took *Cyrano* to their hearts despite all his boasting and swashbuckling and pedantry and proboscis.

Do not for a moment imagine that the actors had any part in the supreme delight that reigned at the theatre when Rostand's wonder-piece had its first American representation. With the sparsest exceptions they one and all stood without the charmed circle of exquisite verse that incloses Rostand's conceits. The chief player of the occasion, the one who made the brave attempt to show the *Cyrano* of the poet's fancy in flesh and blood, never for a moment emerged from his own illicit particularity into the domain of perfect beguilement. The swaggering, blustering, sword-clanging and spur-jangling Gascon, with the learning of forty Academies at his finger-tips and the wit of as many Molières at his tongue's end, became in his hands a mincing cynic, with much of the manner of a drawing-room raconteur, a flinger of polite repartee. In his delivery of Rostand's matchless lines he rarely, if ever, caught the flavor of the time or the complexion of the circumstance. He recited the swinging verse after the fashion of the lyceum elocutionist. In his gesture and antics he was frequently the point-making comedian rather than the unconsciously exaggerating Gascon. And the other actors followed their leader in his habitual excursions without the author's fancy. But then, what have the misdeeds of actors to do with the consideration of such a play as "Cyrano de Bergerac"—wherein the vibrant glories of letters and the soft sensualities of scenic craft mingle in a harmony that may awaken the shade of Shakespeare with alarm of rivalry.

Two Revivals and Their Significance

Two Revivals and Their Significance

WHEN Dumas' "Femme de Claude" was revived some time since at the Paris Renaissance it won a success of sensation and of vogue notably greater than on the occasion of its first production in 1873. The event amazed that element of the critical faculty that stubbornly maintains that the theatre is essentially and wholly a distraction, a pastime, and that when it becomes a battleground of ideas, a medium for the exploitation of social or economic philosophies, it ceases to be the theatre. These slaves of tradition and convention, unable to evade the obvious intent and inspiration of "Femme de Claude," recognizing that it is plainly a play prototypical of the dramatic devices of the Northern school, viewed its increase of popular frequence and critical consideration with something very like consternation. "Is it possible," one of them exclaimed, "that the influence of Ibsen and his colleagues has worked an evolution—a revolution—in the French spirit? Is the stage, then, to degenerate into a list for the combat of ideas represented by personages who are mere abstractions—'utilities,' to use the terminology of the academy?"

Of course the truth does not lie at the extreme established by the prejudice and passion that transpire

from these words; but the fresh success in Paris of such a play as "Femme de Claude" and the fresh failure in New York of such a play as "Lady Clancarty" indicated pretty clearly the trend of modern dramatic art.

Only a very few years ago—but yesterday it seems—"Lady Clancarty," done by the favorite actors and in the sumptuous manner of the production in reference, would have been acclaimed a palpable hit. The critics, in all probability, would have applauded the enterprise; the public would have thronged the playhouse.

The immediate actuality was quite otherwise. "Lady Clancarty," despite the personal authority of the chief actors and the conspicuous interest of its *mise-en-scène*, proved unattractive. There was even some mild wonder that this play of Taylor's should ever have prospered.

It will not do, though, to dismiss Taylor's drama as tedious, artificial, conventional and, worst of all, deadly uninteresting. "Lady Clancarty," so far from being all of these things, is really an excellent play of its kind. Delightfully romantic, just stilted enough to reach a level of poesy, containing a sufficiency of spirited and inspiriting episode, piquant in historical suggestion, elegant in diction, an heroic atmosphere pervading—surely, that is not a stupid play! For my own part, I recall distinctly that even with Mrs. Langtry in the chief rôle I found "Lady Clancarty" a play of more than ordinary gratification.

The reason for the popular and critical indifference

with which the revival of "Lady Clancarty" was received lies elsewhere than in the play. It is not that the virtue of Taylor's famous drama has dissipated; but that the world has done with plays that are merely plays. Is it difficult to discern that the work of the dead Englishman fails to impress us for much the same reason that the "Gismonda" of the living Frenchman missed our fancy and interest? Can any honest student of the matter escape the conviction that the change that works the failure, in these days, of dramas like the ones under notice lies not in the plays themselves, nor in the players—but in the public? We have outgrown Sardou and all the lesser lights that rely for effectiveness on the ingenuity of incident, on the play of hackneyed passions, on the variation of situations essentially identical. Like the prophet, we are sick of love—love of the sort that has inspired and informed the dramas of familiarity. The scenic contrivance that would lay hold of men's fancy and hearts in these days must have significance—moral, philosophic significance. It must deal with the problems that come home to us—problems something more pregnant and potent than those of mere sentiment and emotion. It must teach a lesson, point a moral, start a thought pertinent to the life and affairs of the moment.

Insistence on this idea may be forgiven because of its evident disregard even by those whose material interests lie in prompt recognition of the fact. Such no longer laugh at Ibsen—fancy laughing at Ibsen!—

or Hauptmann or Sudermann, or Pinero in earnest mood, or Maeterlinck or Giacosa. But they will assure you none the less earnestly that the thesis-play is nothing more considerable than a fad, a caprice of the literary fashion of the moment, an affectation of the pedantic, a subterfuge of men who have not the gift of constructing a "real" play and who, therefore, seek to palm off logic, philosophy, wit and morality in place of theatric incident and situation—using those terms in their local sense. It is an eccentricity of taste, an abnormality, sneer these skeptics, that accepts with favor the thesis-play; the evil will correct itself in due season; the stage will return again to its consecrated conventions—the public to its conceit with mawkish sentimentality and lime-light heroics.

It never seems to occur to them that the so-called "new school" of the theatre is no innovation at all; that it is really the oldest of old schools, as old as the hills. The stage in its simplicity has always been an academy, a pulpit, a forum, for the discussion and dissemination of moral, philosophic, economic and partiotic ideas. Has not the Punch-and-Judy Show, with its frequent discomfiture of the gendarme, been condemned by a French magistrate on the ground that it encourages anarchy? Were miracle plays anything but mediums for imparting religious lessons? Was it not in "The Clouds" that Aristophanes presented to the Athenians his debate on education, with its protest against the vogue of the Sophists? What was the "Knights" but a thesis-piece calculated

to end the power of the demagogue Cleon? Is not a whelming moral motive the inspiration of every one of the tremendous tragedies of Sophocles? So it is with all of the works that the world has been unwilling to let die.

Nor does this hold true only in the case of the writers when the world was young. Even such a trifle as "Le Mariage Forcé" of Molière teaches its lesson that one is not likely to forget. And as for "L'École des Femmes" and "Les Précieuses Ridicules," they are as palpably thesis-pieces as "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray" or "The Liars" or "El Gran Galeoto."

It is no new thing, you see, no fad nor abnormality, this presence of a genuine motive of sincere significance in a device whose superficial intent is diversion, amusement pure and simple.

For the return of the public taste to the pristine conditions of the drama we must thank in part—in small part, perhaps—those very same protestants against the revolution. Their devotion to the claptrap of the theatre had reached a degree of idolatry that was absolutely unbearable to reason and decent intelligence. In the composition of their paltry contrivances they insisted upon the presumption that the public of theatre-goers was a body of drooling yokels, equipped with only the most rudimentary mental faculties; incapable of comprehending any thought or utterance that was not given visible expression on the stage. "You must never relate any

episode" was one of their cut-and-dried rules of technique. "You must act it out before their very eyes." So if in the course of a play Mr. Jones informed Mrs. Brown that he had just come from Mrs. Smith's where he had a cup of tea, the devotees of theatric tradition raised their hands in holy horror at the inept sacrilege. "Oh, that is preposterous," they would cry; "that is where the play goes to pieces! The author should have shown us Mr. Jones at Mrs. Smith's in the act of taking the cup of tea. He should not ask us to accept the fact at second hand through his statement to Mrs. Brown!"

However, the extreme to which mediocrity has pushed its knowledge of stage mechanism in these latter days has but a small share in precipitating the reaction that brought unexpected success to such a play as "Femme de Claude" and unexpected failure to the revived "Lady Clancarty." The chief agent in these results is to be found in the keener development of the public mind in the direction of pure intelligence and profound humanity. Emerson has said that every fact is related on one side to sensation, on the other to morals. In the past, the immediate past, the stage has occupied itself with the sensational side of facts. Modern judgment and gratification demand scenic treatment on the side that relates to morals. Whether or not the race is to be congratulated on this event is not a matter for discussion in this place; but the circumstances that have brought about the obvious change in this phase of artistic life

are plain to every thinking man. Tense conditions beset contemporary existence, evincing themselves in problems of society and politics that have not confronted man in many cycles—probably not since the governmental experiments of twenty centuries ago.

Of one thing we may be certain—the new order of things in the theatre is no accident, no passing whim. It is the product undeniably of a more vigorous education of the general, a more subtle intelligence, a quicker humanity and, finally, a more wholesome taste.

I do not wonder that the crude, unlettered men, the hacks, copyists, imitators, who have hitherto supplied the material for the American stage, should find it difficult to realize the altered conditions. The change is still so fresh. Only a few years since a London audience howled at Tennyson's "Promise of May," not because it was a bad play, but because it was a daring one! "The stage," the laureate said on that occasion, "must be in a very low state indeed, if, as some dramatic critics are telling us, none of the great moral and social questions of the time can be touched upon in a modern play."

When one regards what has happened in the theatre, in its temper and in its literature, since Tennyson penned that complaint, one cannot but exult over the eagerness with which the public has shaken off the stuffy, tawdry mantle of traditions and donned a garb freer, more honest and more heroic.

The fine wits that have given us within the past few years plays that really catch the living manners have

not led the public in this matter; they have only anticipated, by a very short step, the general demand whose presence they felt by virtue of the intuition of nice talents.

It was always the plea of the "old school" that they contributed muck and mawkishness to the stage in obedience to public fancy. Will they assert, then, that anything but the public fancy compels the thesis-plays that command prosperity in these days? What Macaulay says of the fisherman is as true of the new school as of the old; the choice of the bait is determined by the taste of the fish, not by that of the angler. In offering the public the drama of logic, reason and humanity, the stage writer supplies the demand of the hour. The sentiment lies as much with the public as with the author.

Let us hear no more about the conventionalities of the stage or the traditions of play-making. They are the Mrs. Harrises of the world of scenic fancy. They no longer have any existence in reality and it may be doubted whether they were ever anything but bogie-man myths, ignorant superstitions, scare-crows set up by shrewd mediocrity to frighten talent from the rich field of the theatre. The idea that every play except hopeless tragedy must have a happy ending; the droll notion that the principal characters in a play must come on only by certain doors and that the secondary characters must have their particular and exclusive ports of entry; the cut-and-dried absurdity that the leading man must speak just so many lines during the

evening's performance; that the leading woman must have her well-defined stint of utterances; that the villain should speak just so often, and that the man-servant and the maid-servant should have their subordination indicated by the corresponding paucity of speech —that, in short, the making of a play was first and foremost an affair of carpentry or joinery, we have probably heard the last word in contention of such conceits, for some time at any rate.

Recent instances have brushed away supersitions that for a generation or half a century have successfully resisted every attempt to drive them out of the theatre. We have had several obvious opportunities to discover the flimsy character of what many would have us believe to be well-established truths regarding the stage and its affairs. The conspicuous successes on the boards—successes in the best and fullest sense of the term—openly defy all the clap-trap rules formulated and enforced by the dolts and hacks whom the public has been cajoled or bullied into regarding as men of brilliant parts.

And the greatest failures—failures in the best and fullest sense of the term—pursue just the opposite course and abide by all the laws and by-laws invented and practiced by the self-heralded technicians. From the respective results achieved by these diverse methods it cannot be denied, even by the audacious charlatans who have persistently and with advantage to themselves proclaimed the contrary, that mind has proved its superiority over mechanism; that it has

been shown that heartiness is quite as effective as artifice; that in these days soul avails for just as much on the stage as does skill. And, best of all, that taste is more potent in the evolution of a good play than is the most expert conformity to the ridiculous rules that have for years and years filled the stage with preposterous caricatures of humanity. Who, after contrasting the honest successes of the moment, can doubt that an ounce of inspiration has proved to be better than an infinity of imitation, that a gleam of originality goes farther than gallons of midnight oil spent in rummaging old plays in search of "situations" of supposedly permanent potency for amusement and effect?

In these discussions I detest invidious mention; but because of their values in illustrating my intent, I must cite the comparative nothingness of such plays as "The Heart of Maryland" and "Secret Service." They are the work of men who are supposed to know all about play-writing—or, rather, wrighting. They doubtless have every one of the tricks and conventions and superstitions of the stage at their fingers' ends. Their plays, I presume, are constructed with a sense of just how many lines each character must speak; just how long each one must be on and off the stage; just how much time must elapse in working up to a situation in order that the play in its entirety will be a symmetric, congruous and harmonious whole. I have no doubt that "The Heart of Maryland" and "Secret Service" are models in this regard. But all the same they are not to be compared for beauty, charm, sym-

pathy or theatric effectiveness with works which have come from the pen of some absolute novices in playwriting. Of course, before this, a new light has suddenly burst into one or another of the arts, defying all laws, putting to shame all traditions; but the concatenation of surprising failure and still more surprising success in the instances under consideration is too significant to be regarded as merely accidental and therefore without permanent significance.

I would not for the world be understood as intimating that the accepted playwrights of the day in this country are not men of more than ordinary cleverness—in their way: but, if we must know them by their works, it certainly does not seem a very exalted way—a way from which great and permanent good will ever come to the American theatre. They may never go seriously wrong at all; but it should always be borne in mind that they never go very far right. Their timidity, their apparent want of originality, their commonplace—and mistaken—convictions as to what is surely calculated to catch the general fancy, and, above all, their seeming superficiality, their apparent ignorance of real life, are insurmountable barriers to the attaintment of truly great results. What talents they have waste themselves on triviality.

For plays that will mark the beginning of our national theatre we must look to the new men and women, those who have no acquaintance with the stock properties of the theatre in which the accepted playwrights of the community, "the old school," are

so proficient. The new men and women will bring to their work minds untrammeled, hearts unhardened, and tastes uncorrupted by the stupid superstitions of the stage. And they will studiously avoid all the old and tried episodes and situations, not simply because they are old and tried, but because their ambition, as well as their conscience—literary conscience, I mean—impels them to originality even though it be dangerous and more liable to failure than the method of their more famous predecessors in the business of play-making.

Perhaps, though, the greatest advantage that the new men and women of the theatre have over the old is their hopelessness. They expect nothing, they count on nothing, they look for nothing. They know nothing about the "public," of which the old-school playwrights and the managers know everything. They follow the dictates of their sentiments, their affections, their literary training, and their tastes, either naturally correct or corrected by comprehensive culture. Their first purpose is to please themselves rather than to please the mass. And as their tastes are much more difficult and fastidious, much truer in conception of beauty and logic, it follows as a matter of course that in seeking to satisfy the demands of their own intellect, fancy and judgment, they rise to far greater heights than those who aim only to gratify the mob.

Their ignorance of the public and its supposed manner of mind in what pertains to the stage, that is among the most splendid gifts of the new man and

woman who stand now on the threshold of the theatre. The reader knows that for years the dominant doctrine in the American theatre has held that pronounced success could be obtained only by pieces light and frolicsome. You doubtless remember how we have been telling one another—and been told, too, through the press and from the pulpit, and also, persistently, from the box-office—that we are the hardest-working and hardest-worked people in the world. That no other nation under the sun went through such a daily stress of mental and physical exertion. That in the intense struggle to stand out more resplendent than all the rest of mankind our faculties were exerted, our nerves strained, to a degree never before known to mankind. And that, therefore, when we went to the playhouse in the evening for diversion and relaxation, we must have that form of entertainment that imposed the least burden on our intelligences and emotions. In short, that the only thing that we could do with comfort on such occasions was to giggle or guffaw. It were something in the nature of cruelty to animals, was the constant argument put forth, for men and women driven, harried, worried, strained throughout the day, to submit themselves to forms of entertainment that require the exercise of any faculties beyond those belonging to the cachinnatory muscles of the face and abdomen.

The author who could shake our sides was applauded; he who sought to shake our wits was damned. But somehow it fell out that we began to wonder and question whether we really were the

hardest-working people in the world, whether the powers-that-be had imposed upon us obligations greater than those put upon the rest of mankind. Perhaps we looked about us and asked ourselves where were the products of all this amazing and unprecedented exercise of magnificent faculties. Were we accomplishing such marvels in the arts or the letters or the sciences that we were entitled to a season of slothfulness to which other nations had no right to presume? Indeed, we began finally to ask ourselves, after our panics and industrial strifes and various commercial disturbances, whether we were so pre-eminent even in that domain of finance in which we had fancied ourselves peerless, that we had a right to lower forms of amusement than other nations.

We regarded France with her splendid literature, England with her noble art, Germany with her masterly science; and when we compared their achievements with our own in the same departments of human activity, we began to ponder whether we could not at least try a form of entertainment as considerable as theirs, as dignified, as ambitious, as polite, and as finished; and whether there was not a delight, refreshing, recreative, better than that inhering in a roar of laughter. We began to realize that the mirror our stage held up to nature was violently convex or concave—the sort that fills the open-mouthed bumpkins at the country fair with hilarious mirth. And once this speculation and introspection discovered to us the truth, the fate of the scene-mechanic was sealed.

What the "Prisoner of Zenda" Stood for

What the "Prisoner of Zenda" Stood for

THE last scene of the last act of one of the most beautiful plays and one of the most delightful performances that this generation of theatre-goers has known, should forever silence the boors and blockheads who continue to rail and jeer at the so-called problem-play. If justification ever was needed for the drama of soulfulness, truth to nature in its purity, to reasonableness, that final episode in "The Prisoner of Zenda," as presented on the stage, would of itself fulfill the want.

Even at the risk of seeming obtrusively positive, dogmatic, it is best to make that assertion with all possible emphasis. For the instant and complete success of the play that Edward Rose fashioned out of Anthony Hope's famous novel was greedily seized upon as a token of a popular revulsion against the thesis-drama.

Never was there a greater blunder: never was the truth more flagrantly disregarded. "The Prisoner of Zenda" is a thesis-play if there ever was one—a thesis play as surely, in its essence if not its form and manner, as any of the classics of Ibsen, Sudermann,

Hauptmann, Giacosa, Dumas, or Pinero. As obviously, directly and heartily as any of these, "The Prisoner of Zenda" speaks a moral, teaches a lesson.

And I am tempted to add that but for those others, pioneers that have cleared from the way of dramatic progess the rubbish of tradition and clap-trap of convention that have for years beset it, the wholly charming presentation would have had no existence in its actual form. That last scene in the last act—the crowning inspiration of the whole composition—would never have found a place behind the footlights of an American theatre, were it not for the brave intellects that fools and fribblers still presume to despise. A few years ago no manager would have tempted failure by such an ending as lifts this apparent romance-drama to the dignity of a problem-play. And had he made the venture it is almost certain that the public would have disapproved the innovation and have deemed unsatisfying that which in the event they found to the last degree exquisite. Such changes has the problem-play worked, despite the chaff and sophistry of the unthinking.

Who does not remember—it was only yesterday that they were dinning it into our ears—that familiar tenet of the theatre that imposed "happy dénouements," "cheerful curtains," upon the playwright? Send the audience home contented—give the heroine to the hero—marry everybody all around—let your moon hang high—drop the baize on an O-let's-be-joyful picture! That was the formula that regulated dra-

matic art in this country only a few years ago. That simple doctrine comprised all the Thirty-nine Articles to whichevery candidate for admittance to the sanctum of the manager had to subscribe. Thus it was here—and in most other countries, I fancy—until the derided Ibsen and his followers blazed the road to sincerity and beauty.

It is quite possible that such a story as "The Prisoner of Zenda," rich in perilous adventure, warm in color of circumstance, entrancing with love and chivalry, would have found its way to the stage of the period we have regarded: but certainly not in its present form. Everyone concerned in the enterprise would have discerned at a glance the necessity of distorting the novelist's creation to conform to the exigencies of the theatre—as they existed in those days.

"If love were all!" the *Princess Flavia* pleads with *Rassendyll*, who holds her heart in the hollow of his hand—"if love were all!" The king she was pledged to wed, the house she was bound to sustain, the country she was born to serve—what need she care for them—"if love were all!"

Can you not guess, O reader, how that would have changed to satisfy the theatric conditions of yesterday? "Love is all!" the *Princess Flavia* would have been made to say—the splendid creature would never have said it of her own accord, you may be quite sure—"Love is all!" What are sovereign, state, house, honor, as against that? And will you deny that yesterday we

would have admitted the necessity of the alteration and applauded the amorous sentimentality to the echo? Would we have been content to surrender the fair princess to the sodden, burnt-out *Elphberg?* Or to tear such a hero as *Rassendyll* from the straining arms of his sweetheart and consign them both to the torments of severed lives? Would not the green baize of the Lyceum—a theatre whose fortunes were founded on the distinctly bourgeois drama—have fallen on a comfortable, cozy, homely vision of the O-let's-be-joyful sort? With *Flavia* and *Rudolf* clasped in a polite embrace and a honeymoon impending in the background? "If love were all," indeed! Love *is* all!" the pair would have cooed to each other and to the audience. And the latter would have gone home with a sense of having seen just the nicest little play that ever was—"much better than the book, you know, because the book had such an unsatisfactory ending." *Flavia's* patrician conceit of honor, *Rudolf's* chivalry, Anthony Hope's inspiration—all would have been sacrificed to that popular distaste for "unsatisfactory" finales.

It should be added in fairness to the theatric exploiters of yesterday that had their æsthetic sense forbidden the sacrifice, "The Prisoner of Zenda" would have won nothing more substantial than a success of esteem. A few elect spirits would have marveled at the failure of the piece to fascinate the multitude and have finally been driven to the despairing conclusion that it was "over the heads" of the

crowd. Then the poem would have been shelved and a revival of "Chumley" or "Lettarblair" or some similar drivel would have immediately restored the actors to their place in the general patronage.

It was one of the most hopeful signs of the times in the theatre—the immediate and almost unprecedented popularity of "The Prisoner of Zenda." In its actual form, I mean—with that last scene of the last act cast in a mold of fidelity to nature at its best instead of at its showiest; with the verb of the *Princess Flavia's* line in the subjunctive instead of in the indicative; with that majestic "if" accorded its full dramatic significance. There never was more virtue in an "if" than in the one that seized its place on the stage of the Lyceum and looked out upon the quick rout—for good and all, let us hope—of the ninnies who giggled at the problem-play.

I know that some will maintain that such a play as "The Prisoner of Zenda," presented as it was at the Lyceum, acted with skill and grace and taste, could at no time and in no place have fallen short of complete prosperity. In any region—the bush of Australia; among any people—Fijis or Esquimaux; at any period—the Dark Ages—the grace, passion and animation of the work must pleasure and convince. That at any time in the near past it would have failed to satisfy us will be generally dismissed as absurd. But I believe that if it were possible to turn back the last few years and put us to the test, the actuality would be found to be as I have represented it. If this seems incred-

ible to you and me, dear reader, it is only another proof of how thoroughly the problem-play has accomplished its mission; how completely it has dissolved the cobweb that stupidity and tradition had woven before our eyes; how it has sharpened our wits and polished our tastes and made us sensible of a great light, until we can hardly realize or remember the murk in which we lately groped.

If one dwells insistently on that realistic and dramatic, but wholly untheatric, episode of the play under notice it is because its significance was so viciously or ignorantly misconstrued by the mob that assails the brave minds that made the scene possible. And, because, too, of its surpassing graciousness and acknowledged effectiveness. Its perfection gives it supremacy in the argument, not its primality. There had been other though less decisive instances, within a recent period, of the revolution that has established the thesis-play in the dominance of the theatre. Do you know what would have become of *Trilby* if she had taken to the stage under the old régime? Died? Never—at any rate not so long as her exploiters wished to attract profitable patronage. No—*Trilby* would have lived and married *Little Billee*. "A murrain on Du Maurier!"—the manager would have retorted to the dramatist's protest—"we've got to have a happy ending." And before the curtain fell *Trilby* would assure the company and the audience that though she may have been *Svengali's* wife for a time, the mesmeric rascal had never so much as kissed her

hand. The public had their own notions about such matters—in the old days—and the traditions of the theatre strictly prohibited any shock to their prejudices. Those same prejudices would have availed to rob "The Masqueraders" of one of the most poetic climaxes in the modern drama. Instead of *Remon* bidding his lost sweetheart meet him "in Andromeda —where everything is real," he would most likely have suggested Nice or Naples or some other romantic spot especially high in theatric favor. And *Paula Tanqueray*—if you would know how—in the days before the artistic honesty, the sincerity and intellectual refinement of the thesis-play made possible such delights as that last scene in "The Prisoner of Zenda" —if you are curious to fathom how Pinero's heroine would have atoned for her sins and folly, you have but to recall the fate that Augustus Thomas meted out to the erring *Margaret Doane* in "The Capitol." Ennui, despair, wretchedness, suicide? No, no—a poke-bonnet, a gray gown, a spiritual reconciliation with the man she wronged—that was Mr. Thomas's ideal of dramatic fitness. And what is more, the public would still have been of his fancy, were it not for the problem-plays that have given us that last scene in "The Prisoner of Zenda" and everything else of the stage that is admirable and worth holding.

The Worst of Its Kind

The Worst of Its Kind

SUCH a play as "The Heart of Maryland" is a liberal education in the science of the stage. It proves more convincingly than any similar work of the time how wholly ineffective is pure theatricalism. The play has approximately every quality commonly supposed to make for interest in a stage-piece, for strength, for captivation. Scarcely one of the ordinary and approved devices of starting the emotions of the spectator, of piquing his imagination, of catching his fancy, of playing upon human weakness, has been overlooked. It is a story of love and war—the most enthralling twain of themes—of patriotism and passion—the most altruistic and the most selfish of sentiments striving for mastery in a struggle calculated to hold the lookers-on in a spell of excitement. The representation reverberates with martial turmoil—the roll of drums, the screech of fifes, the distant roar of cannon. All the circumstance of war, its frightening havoc, its sacrifices and cruelties, its daring intrigue, the picturesqueness of its trappings, the chivalry and exaltation of its factors—all are employed to stir and color "The Heart of Maryland." Employed, too, by faculties expert to the last degree in the mechanics of the stage. The certainty and maturity of the author's experience are admirable: the facility and familiarity

with which Mr. Belasco handles the tools of his trade—his is only a trade—are most respectable—almost inspiriting. It was real entertainment merely to note the author's intimate acquaintance with the elements of his calling—the confident knowledge with which he wove the conventional colors and figures into a scenic web. And there was even something of amusement in the wonder with which one realized that all this easy craft and laborious cunning produced nothing better than a piece of fustian—particularly flimsy and shoddy fustian at that.

One rubbed one's eyes in marvel that such a mouse of a play should spring from such a mountain of machinery. To view for three hours a march-past of all the "strong" situations of this generation of the theatre—episodes of politics, strategy, murder, love, hate, villainy, virtue angelic, war, peace, tragedy, comedy—and then leave the theatre with an impression something less vivid and hearty than that remaining from a peep into a kinetoscope! There was, I repeat, a curious entertainment in the subtle insubstantiality of the piece. So strangely empty was all the noise, so motionless all the movement, so vain the playwright's elaborate assaults upon heart and imagination, that at times one doubted the vitality of one's sensibilities. It is not easy to describe the impression of nothingness imparted by such a play, to give an image of its hollowness. Fancy yourself standing by the side of a man beating a bass drum with all his might and main and yet producing no sound. Or think of falling—as

one often does in a dream—from a great, great height, headlong through hundreds and thousands of feet of space, and at last landing lightly on your feet without the least jar in the world. Or imagine all the belts and wheels and engines and furnaces of a vast rolling-mill whirring and puffing and thumping and blazing in the work of crushing—a peanut. That is the sort of feeling one has after an evening with Mr. Belasco. His "Heart of Maryland" is not a thing of flesh and blood pulsating with genuine emotions: it is made of India-rubber and is worked with a pair of bellows.

Everything possible in mere stage-craft has been done to give the India-rubber a close resemblance to the material it simulates—I think I have already acknowledged that with sufficient emphasis—and the bellows are used with an unflagging vigor that would do credit to a punkah-wallah fresh to his task. But it is obvious from the futility of all the paint and inflation employed in the enterprise that there is something radically wrong with the core of the work; and the defect is directly traceable to the paltry and patent theatricalism of the affair.

It is not that there are weak spots in "The Heart of Maryland." It is simply that it is weak all over and everywhere—consistently and uniformly weak—from center to circumference, throughout its entire area. It starts from nothing, leads nowhere, and ends in nonentity. It is a counterfeit, of so little substance that it may not even be said to ring false—it does not ring at all.

The author himself has not been able to escape this impression. The last act of his play proves it. Up to that point Mr. Belasco had been exploding what he possibly considers scenic bombs. But when he comes to his fourth act he discovers that so little effect have these wrought that he is content to try the potency of saltpetre torpedoes—the kind that are given to children on the Fourth-of-July. And such shams and frauds are his preceding explosives that his saltpetre toys do not suffer by contrast.

If I have failed thus far to cite instances and episodes from the play to illustrate my meaning, it is only because they all seem so vague, intangible and fleeting that one is unable to make satisfactory selection. And I make bold to assert that they who have proclaimed "The Heart of Maryland" a great play, an absorbing drama, a thrilling concoction, a master-work, would be equally at a loss to illuminate their commendation.

True, there is a bit of picturesque clap-trap at the end of the third act—a mechanical representation of the familiar poem, "Curfew Shall Not Ring To-night," —but the speed and eagerness with which Mr. Belasco's eulogists scurry through the preceding portions of the play to reach this specious pretense for admiration, and the scant consideration they accord all that follows, token clearly enough the poverty of matter fit for laudation. Little wonder that criticism and comment on "The Heart of Maryland" confine themselves to this one factor in the composition; it is

the single solitary feature in all the tumultuous, turgid hodge-podge that remains in memory. And that it does not share the fate of all the other attendant emptiness is due more to the skill and ingenuity of the stage-mechanics than to any inspiration of the author. It is a fine stage-picture—the love-mad heroine hurrying, flying up the long steep belfry stairs, leaping into the hollow cone, grasping the fateful bell-tongue and swinging far out into the night, that no signal may go forth of her lover's flight from death.

But the introduction of the device is so obviously artificial, its employment in "The Heart of Maryland" is so forced, so patent is it that the play was built around the incident instead of the incident growing out of the action, that despite its admitted theatric qualities it loses most of its dramatic effect. The audience is only amused by it—not awed. When the curtain falls upon the commotion, the spectators loll back in their seats and smile. And after that the saltpetre torpedoes of the last act follow as a matter of course.

It is curious, though, to see an audience break into smiles after such a scene as the one that drove Mr. Belasco to the composition of "The Heart of Maryland." To me it was especially significant and convincing because only a few nights before I had had occasion to note a similar event, proving, to my mind, the complete fatuity of mere theatricalism even in the case of a simple and responsive audience. At the Boston Theatre, one of the most prodigally conducted

show-shops in the world, I saw a play called "Burmah"—a melodrama—built out of almost every element that had ever entered into a popular play. There were a score of stage pictures selected as shrewdly—and with as fine sense of inherent pertinence—as that now famous belfry-tower of Mr. Belasco's work. There were situations, tableaux, climaxes, that had proved their efficiency time and time again. There were fights of red-coats against a whole army of Afghans and Zulus. And there was the finest "heart interest" in the world—the King Cophetua and beggar-maid tale—a duke or something of the kind in love—honestly, mind you—with a concert-hall singer. The story of "The Christian" without Hall Caine's hypocrisy. There was one tremendous scene showing the last stand, in the tropic jungle, of the ducal lover's command against an overwhelming force of body-bared, shining-skin natives—one of the most majestic contrivances of stage-management I have ever seen anywhere. At the moment when it seems the red-coats must go under, a reserve force dashes to the rescue with a Gatling gun. The horrible machine opens its maw, and myriads of spear-raising blacks fall before its fire. Surely, I recollect thinking, an audience—a promiscuous, everyday audience—cannot resist that! The curtain fell—I looked about me—the people lolled back in their seats and smiled—just as they did after the "great" scene of Mr. Belasco's play.

The moral is plain enough. Mere theatricalism is

deadly to dramatic effectiveness. That statement may strike some as being so axiomatic as to seem sophomoric: but its utterance is justified by the confidence and frankness with which men expert in the business of the theatre, in all its departments, have recourse to such methods as we have seen employed in "The Heart of Maryland." It is justified, too, by the stubborn prevalence hereabout of the mistaken notion that the essential elements in successful plays are those that have proved their futility in the work under notice. And, all above, it is justified by the ignorant or careless or venal or intimidated criticism that proclaims such a piece as "The Heart of Maryland" to be a great play, an absorbing drama, a thrilling concoction, a master-work.

Plays of Hypocrisy

Plays of Hypocrisy

THE ONE FROM ENGLAND

THEY say that the play of "The Christian" is even better than the book. Then I thank the gods I have never read the book. I doubt, though, that its offenses against truth, good taste and sincerity in letters exceed those of the exasperating device put upon the stage. There are limits even to balderdash and bathos: extremes beyond which vulgarity and cant and hypocrisy cannot go; and Hall Caine's play of "The Christian" scrapes the very bottom of abysmal fraud.

I went to the Knickerbocker Theatre in the pleasant prejudice that I should behold a stirring, palpitant, picturesque drama: elemental, crude perhaps, but yet vital and sturdy and compelling. From various considerable communities where the play had been given —Albany, Washington, Providence—had come reports of its vast favor with the populace and criticism. Its first production, in a nearby capital, had been witnessed and reviewed by the entire dramatic departments of several metropolitan dailies, and the verdict was distinctly approving. Being neither skeptic, cynic, nor conceited, I inclined to accept that judgment. If now my utterance of difference seems impolitely fer-

vent, excuse inheres in the shock of disappointment. For "The Christian" is the meanest sham ever foisted upon a deluded public, and Hall Caine, its author, is the most impudent bunco-steerer in the Sixth Avenue of literature. At the conclusion of one of the acts on the occasion of its first presentation in New York he was called before the curtain. Instead of the applause that greeted him there should have been jeers, catcalls and vegetables and—and things. A community that made Count Johannes and James Owen O'Connor act Shakespeare behind a wire net need not have hesitated to give Hall Caine his due.

Considered as a work of letters, "The Christian" would not deserve such fervor of denunciation. It is too pitiably petty, too hopelessly insignificant. It is positively appealing in its poverty of imagination, philosophy and craft. Irresistibly, one pitied the intellectual straits of a self-styled dramatist who tried to impart joyance and humor to his episodes by the introduction of Mother Goose rhymes and quotations so hackneyed and trite that the auditor could only marvel at the innocence or audacity of their employment. The attempts at comedy in "The Christian" are, I repeat, pathetic in their puerility and staleness. They are so abortive as to embarrass the spectators, both for themselves and the actors. One has a distinct impression of abashed sympathy for performers forced to take part in such unblushing ineptitude.

Of course the comic misadventure would stand as no mortal injury to the play were its pretensions in other

directions valid. But what shall be said of a play that does not contain in all its five loquacious acts one fresh thought, one ingenious conceit of fancy, one novel play of words or one turn of skillful phrase? From eight o'clock to eleven a sear stretch of commonplace, until the pulse fags and eyelids droop in sympathy with the monotony. Mediocrity, no. Even mediocrity has a sparse instant of exhilaration, and Hall Caine, in the play of "The Christian," never lifts his head above the level of obvious buncombe.

Apparently Caine has not learned the conventional accomplishments of his calling: the devices and makeshifts of the skilled worker in letters, whereby admirable counterfeits of brilliance and grace may be fashioned. I am not demanding of the author of "The Christian" that he discover genius or even talent. A man is what the fates will and is above blame for his failings. But when he boldly proclaims himself a litterateur he must at least prove mastery of the mechanics of his art. Caine's work in the play that has been one of the popular rages of the season would shame an apprentice at the trade of writing.

But even his literary sins might be forgiven—once he entered the theatre—did his play move in an atmosphere of reality, on lines of verity and sincerity. Many men have contrived reasonable, cordial, satisfying, and even beautiful dramas, with only scant equipment of eloquence and rhetoric. Caine's offenses in "The Christian" go far beyond mere transgressions of craft. It is the rank hypocrisy of the adventure,

the sniveling cowardice, the cant and falsity that should damn it into prompt oblivion. O, the meanness of the sham and the pity that it was not vociferously proclaimed long ago! Surely, in all the frequence of the academy of criticism there are a few men as sensate as I am, as quick of perception and as frank of opinion, and yet they pretend not to see through this gauzy scheme of prostituting sacred circumstance to the sordid uses of the show-shop. Though a man be pagan, he must revolt at the nauseous fraud of Caine's scheme. His gorge must rise and his stomach turn at the mawkish, maudlin abuse of saintly speech and sentiment, the dragging-in of sacred song and sacrosanct trappings as sanctimonious excuse for the theatric exploitation of the music-hall, with its accompaniment of modish goats, stale champagne and purple-lipped harlots.

For that is just what Hall Caine has done with "The Christian." Under the perfectly patent pretense of preaching a moral lesson, this bungling fakir has rigged up a number of mummers in monastic habiliments; put into their mouths the hollow, tinselly speech of prigs and Pharisees: defiled prayer and holy song for the essential purpose of making the unsophisticated accept as a heroine a ridiculously unreal concert-hall wench, who has no more real virtue in her composition than any of the "kept women" with whom she habitually associates throughout the play. What *Glory Quayle* may be in the book of "The Christian" I do not know: but in the scenic presentation of the story the author has made her a curious compound of silli-

ness and nastiness—one of the sisterhood demi-verge. And though Caine were to protest his pastoral simplicity from now till doomsday, though he were to sniffle columns in support of the union of Church and theatre, though he were to blow and bellow his sickening platitudes into a hundred priggish and bilious and amorous *John Storms*, he could not persuade me that he is less fraudulent as a preacher than as a writer. "The Christian," I would repeat again and again, is the meanest sham that ever disgraced the theatre, and the man who exploited it ought to be promptly consigned to the limbo of frauds who seek to thrive on religious hypocrisy.

Not, mind you, because of his use of ecclesiastical episodes in the construction and decoration of his play, but because of the preposterously bad use. In connection with "The Christian" it is not worth while to discuss the propriety, in art or morals, of introducing the Church upon the scene. The manner in which the introduction is made in Caine's play is its own damnation. It makes argument of the question absurd. Yes, I have witnessed the pageant of a high mass in St. Peter's at Rome, and bowed in submission to the influences of human art in sacred offices; and I have lingered over the Madonna of Raphael and felt that the Story might be brought home even to a skeptic heart by such a master painting: but another such play as "The Christian," if the public be not taught its unblushing chicane, will keep Church and stage apart for a hundred years. If that consummation be desir-

able, then the absurd transformation of Caine's novel will have worked no harm, but if the drama have within itself possibilities of forum and pulpit, the ignorant, venal or only misguided acclamation of such fustian and clap-trap, masquerading as morality, as Caine has put upon the American stage, is a blunder little short of sin.

I dare him, I dare him, to produce "The Christian" in London.

THE ONE FROM FRANCE

"ZAZA" is a sewer. Theatric cunning has colored its walls with monstrous arabesques in hues that shriek and grimace. Scenic skill has mixed its peccant waters with the stench of musk. Patent fraud pretends to refine the muck in the purifying sun of love. But a sewer this play from France remains for all the masking.

By what magic the mob and the critics have been brought to regard this product of Parisian sumps as a source of æsthetic delight surpasses me: unless it be that magic of sensual corruption where with Circe turned Ulysses's mates into swine.

Throughout four acts of the drama by MM. Simon and Berton the spectator is asked to sympathize with the vulgar caprices, the libidinous phantasies, the tawdry jealousies, the hysterical vaporings, the ridiculous rage of a burnt-out slattern. A creature of foul speech and fouler manners, too lazy and nasty to keep her soiled linens from the presence of her lover—with the argot of the brothel on her lips, the leer of the

street-walker in her eyes, the revolting restlessness of an animal deserted in the mating season.

That is the heroine—save the mark!—of the play that the youth of the town might view in wonder and questioning at the Garrick Theatre. For "Zaza" has been proclaimed the most tumultuous triumph of the theatrical season, and I would not court the charge of squeamishness and hypocrisy by suggesting that no young man or woman could witness the performance without contamination or disgust.

The last act of this precious drama, they would have us believe, compensates for all the vility that has gone before. The brief aspect of *Zaza*, limping languidly to her carriage from the stage-door of a high-priced concert hall, and declining in funereal tones to resume illicit relations with her former lover, is supposed to give the device a moral that justifies its three hours of dank depravity.

But it needs a faint memory to forget the gross and hideous spectacle of the heroine's congenial life with the drabs and lechers of the Saint-Étienne "dive." The scenes in *Zaza's* dressing-room, with the actors and hangers-on drinking champagne from wash-basins, slop-jar covers and rouge-pots; the brawls with rivals; the frank pandering of *Zaza's* horrible relative; the slovenly, repulsive disorder in which the lovers thread their frenetic infatuation: the very attire of *Zaza*—the customary transparency, scarlet and spangles of expert harlotry; get the taste of all that out of your mouth, if you can. Then, possibly, you

might savor the moral intention of the vicious presentment.

In the play, as wrought out in the original French, the heroine persists in her unclean promiscuity to the very end of the story. That, at any rate, is honesty in art, if not in morality. There is no sneaking allurement of beneficent teaching and sacred purpose. *Zaza* stands, therefore, as a firmly drawn, gaudily colored, completely consistent characterization.

As a result of the violent and wholly unnatural reformation accredited to *Zaza* in the Americanized version of the play, the last act fails of effect. It is woefully unconvincing. The preposterous contrast starts neither belief nor sympathy. The final curtain falls with a jolt that arouses the spectator to a vivid sense of the sickly lubricity and maudlin silliness of the scenic nightmare.

A certain quality of skill in the performer who impersonates *Zaza* might possibly prevent this anti-climactic catastrophe. But the actress in the chief rôle of the performance under notice lacked the artistry and the temperamental influence to make the specious change seem plausible. When it came to the symbolization of delicate psychic or cordial sentiments she faltered obviously and fell. She was still the rough and lazy *Zaza* of Saint-Étienne. The languor of her speech and port was not weariness of soul, not the passing of love-life, as Ibsen calls it. She was simply tired, played out—she had just been through her fatiguing act at the Concert des Ambassadeurs. To-

morrow—well, you will see what will happen to-morrow with that *Zaza* of the last act at the Garrick.

Perhaps, too, it is the spectator that is tired when that point in the presentation is reached. For hours he has listened to *Zaza's* bawdy chatter, her ready speeches teeming with smut of the gutter, the taproom, the bagnio. He has heard over and over, again and again, her shallow whine of a neglected and unguided childhood. He has endured her fish-woman squabbles with her maid, with her pandering, absinthe-soaked aunt, her abandoned lover *Cascart*, the satyr, *Duc de Brissac*, who looks old enough and vile enough to make a duchess of the turgid wench. He has been eyewitness to her hot, frequent, sinuous and unrestrained embraces of *Dufrene*, in whose ears she pours a constant caterwauling of perfectly animalistic passion. He has seen her, in the tawdry raiment of a Bowery harridan, whose brazen vulgarity would disgust a sailor fresh from the bilge, weaken in drooling sentimentality before the wife and child of her lover. Oh, yes, the spectator has had his fill of *Zaza* long before that ineffective final curtain. A nauseating surfeit of her whimpers, her croons, her purrs, her whines, her tantrums, her jealous conniptions and repulsive hysterics. A pretty figure, indeed, to be thrust into the tableau of the playhouse—a painted, dyed, be-musked, foul-spoken drab, whom a few months of illicit cohabitation with a man of decent manners is to transform into a theatric martyr for the adoration of the general! And don't think to conjure up that flabby last act to

silence my protest. Those ten minutes of hollow-toned vaporings of love and suffering fade into nothing before three hours of deliberate salacity and lush lubricity.

A picture of life—of one phase of life? No, no, a thousand times no! It is a picture of disease, of death—the death, slow and hideous, reserved for peoples that foster such perversions in the delusion that they belong within the province of the arts.

The edict has gone forth from certain high quarters that the actress who gives so vivid an incarnation of this monstrosity, whose like, in speech, mood and conduct you may find in the dives by the wharf-side, must be hailed as "The American Bernhardt." Well, so be it. But let me remind you that one Maude Adams is of more worth to the nation, to society and to civilization generally than all the "American Bernhardts" that you can stretch from Chicago to Paris.

The First Mrs. Tanqueray

The First Mrs. Tanqueray

Being Pertinent Excerpts from the Private Journal of that Lamented Lady's Husband and Suggesting a Possible Solution of Mr. Pinero's Great Problem Play.

I HAVE been told that my dear friend Cayley Drummle once described the lady who first did me the honor to bear my name as a woman who carried a thermometer beneath her stays and never allowed it to register more than ten degrees below zero. The characterization is not quite accurate. Of course Cayley couldn't know; but the first Mrs. Tanqueray did not wear stays. She eschewed and abjured all such symbols of femine vanity.

So much has been said in the world in which I formerly lived, so much has been written in the scandalous chronicles of the day, concerning my somewhat unconventional choice of a second wife, that I have thought to confide to these pages some of the episodes and circumstances that bent my mind to that selection. Perhaps a perusal and review of them may lead me to discern which of my critics are right: those who say that in replacing the first Mrs. Tanqueray with Paula Ray I behaved like a knave, or those who say that my act was that of a fool, or those who, going to extremes, proclaim me a shameless satyr. It may be

but another indication of the morbid temperament that is said to have brought me to that step, but for my own satisfaction I should like to come to some conclusion as to which of these disagreeable things I really am.

From the very nature of the affair I am driven to this species of self-inquisition. It is one of those matters of which a man may not speak to his best friends. Come to think of it, too, I have precious few friends now of any quality. My old intimates, Frank Misquith and Gordon Jayne, I have not set eyes on since the night when I told them, over the coffee and liqueurs, of my purpose to marry Paula, or Mrs. Jermyns, as they knew her. Cayley Drummle—bless him !—has exhausted his ingenuity in devising excuses for them and all the others who have rubbed my name from their list of acquaintance. But in his heart Cayley knows as well as I do that I have gone to the bottom of the social Dead Sea. And except for Cayley, there is no one standing on the shore to see if I ever come up again.

II.

FONTAINEBLEAU.

It was a glass of water that awoke the first Mrs. Tanqueray to the discovery that our marriage was what she was always pleased to call a grievous mistake.

Our honeymoon was not yet at its full. We were breakfasting one morning on the piazza of a charming little *châlet* that we had taken at Fontainebleau. It so happened that just as we sat down a pack of hounds

went sweeping by in full cry, with a numerous following of green and pink coats. Naturally I turned to gaze after the passing show. I recalled, subsequently, to have heard vaguely above the baying of the dogs and the clatter of the horses, some comment from Mrs. Tanqueray regarding the contents of the carafe. At the moment the remark did not seem to merit or expect any particular attention. It was merely one of those peculiarly feminine ebullitions of delight that fall impartially to a satisfactory sorbet, a Guido Reni fresco, or the Pyramid of Cheops. I should never again in all my life have thought of it but for the prompt and convincing manner in which Mrs. Tanqueray indicated her annoyance at something or other. Throughout the rest of the breakfast she glared at me with an expression of utter disillusionment.

Something of the same look I had seen in her face before. Once, in the first days of the starched courtship that followed the acceptance of my offer of marriage, I had begged the favor of a kiss. My fiancée started back and gasped her consternation. Dismay and despair were written in every line of her countenance. Finally, evidently after an intense struggle with herself, she turned her petal-thin lips to me, saying sadly:

"Oh, yes, I suppose you may, if you like."

Then she added after the frigid embrace:

"I had hoped, Mr. Tanqueray, that you were above that sort of thing."

At the time I was half glad to attribute her senti-

ment to the timidity of maidenhood, to the modesty, possibly prudishness, of a young girl brought up in extreme seclusion. But now, when I noted in her countenance the very same look with which she said "I had hoped that you were above that sort of thing," her words recurred to me with a distinct pang.

All that day Mrs. Tanqueray maintained a silence that was sorrowful rather than sullen. My heartiest endeavors to amuse and interest her flew wide of the mark. In the evening, thinking that a walk through the moonlit woods to where the Seine's sedgy banks touched the forest, could not fail to dispel the shadows, I insisted upon her accompanying me. We strode along in grim quiet for a while, and then, despairing of the initiative on her part, I asked the cause of her unhappiness.

"It is nothing, nothing of any material consequence," Mrs. Tanqueray returned to my reiterated questions; "nothing except that I see clearly that our marriage is a grievous mistake."

I persisted that, to my thinking, that was certainly something of material consequence, and I begged to know what it was that had convinced her of the blunder of our union.

"Simply," she answered in tones so chill and icy that involuntarily I looked to see if a film of frost had not whitened the grass beneath our feet, "simply, Mr. Tanqueray, because there is not one bond of sympathy between us, not one chord in our natures that throbs responsively."

"Good heavens, as bad as that!" I exclaimed.

"Only this morning," my wife went on, not impetuously or vehemently, but rather didactically and judicially, "when at breakfast, with all the enthusiasm of my careless young life, I uttered words that a sympathetic soul would have received with a token of kindred delight, you let them pass unnoticed, disregarded, to fix your attention upon some pageant of idle folly and wicked display."

I racked my brain to recall that pregnant utterance. For the life of me I could think of nothing that justified Mrs. Tanqueray's tremendous rebuke.

"You see, even now," Mrs. Tanqueray continued, with a hint of asperity, "you have no recollection of your—your insult."

"No," I admitted; "I have not."

At last I forced her to an explanation. It seems that as the waiter poured the water from the carafe, it effervesced and sprayed considerably—a by no means amazing phenomenon, considering that the water had only a few minutes before been transferred from the flask in which it had been brought from the spring at Vichy. But Mrs. Tanqueray, "with all the enthusiasm of her careless young life," as she described it, had greeted the occurrence with a cry of—

"Oh, see how that water sparkles!"

The hunt party had carried the words out of my hearing, or at least out of my notice. I knew at the time that Mrs. Tanqueray was saying something, but I did not know, upon my honor as a gentleman, that she

was saying: "Oh, see how that water sparkles!" Otherwise I should certainly have given her no cause to conclude that our marriage was a grievous mistake.

III.

VENICE.

We have been in Italy for several weeks. The stubborn melancholia that seized Mrs. Tanqueray after the awkward episode of the glass of effervescent table-water convinced me that the ozonic airs of Fontainebleau were too strong for her. They fretted her nerves. I told her so, and suggested that we be off to the South. She interposed no objection except to remark wearily that it made little difference where we went! When I repeated my fears—that the forest breezes irritated her—I cited many fellows of my acquaintance on whom they had that effect—she only replied in a voice somber as the raven's:

"Ah, you will never understand, Mr. Tanqueray; that is the saddest of it all, you will never understand."

I hoped and believed, though, that under these sunny skies—where mere acquaintance so often blossoms into affection, and where affection blooms into love, and where love blazes into adoration—Mrs. Tanqueray must come out from under her impenetrable mantle of reserve and emerge from the frosty mist that repelled every advance of companionship.

For my own part, we were not halfway down the south side of the Alps before I experienced that glow and buoyancy that come to every ordinarily constructed

creature at the mere prospect of Italy. I even ventured upon some term of endearment in addressing Mrs. Tanqueray and watched anxiously to note the manner of its reception.

With the same look of disillusionment that came into her face when she discovered in the days of our betrothal that I was not "above that sort of thing," Mrs. Tanqueray observed that it was "just that needless intimacy that made marriages in general woeful blunders and ours in particular a grievous mistake."

It was not long before I had to admit to myself that my device of bring Mrs. Tanqueray to Italy was very disappointing in its working.

The episode of the effervescing table-water was repeated over and over again, but on a much more grandiose and majestic scale. If my failure to respond impulsively to her apostrophe to the sparkling qualities of a glass of vichy moved her to the conviction that my soul was dead, fancy her feelings when she found me incapable of replying to her chirps of admiration when viewing the ruins of the Roman Forum, or Raphael's frescoes in the Sistine Chapel, or the Laocoon of Athenodorus, or the appalling splendor of St. Peter's, or the peerless grace of the Doge's Palace, or the glittering glory of St. Mark's! After her icy, logical tirades against my want of sympathy and artistic emotion I used to feel almost persuaded of my meanness.

And yet, in justice to myself, I should say that I am not by nature an effusive man. I have, I believe, an

absorbing love for the beautiful. The sight of it impresses me vastly, to the point that it inspires me with a vague but poignant sadness. But, unhappily, I am lacking in the faculty of instant utterance of my delight in the terms and manner that women like Mrs. Tanqueray deem indicative of a kindred soul and responsive nature. To me it seems almost impertinent—or, at any rate, unnecessary—to exclaim Grand! when gazing at the Praxiteles Venus; or Superb! when viewing the Dying Gladiator; or Extraordinary! when standing on the spot where Brutus slew Cæsar; or Splendid! when creeping like an ant amid the awful majesty of St. Peter's. There may be natures—Mrs. Tanqueray had one of 'em—whose emotions find ample and complete expression in such ejaculations. Others, again, are not gifted with such facile powers of communicating sentiment.

Often while I stood positively rapt in sensuous enjoyment of some delicious scene—on the heights of Posilipo, on the shore of Ischia, by the Adriatic, or where the snow-flecked Alps frown down upon festooned vineyards—I have listened, mechanically and in silence, to Mrs. Tanqueray's caustic railings at my dull perceptions and utter want of the æsthetic sense. In the light of subsequent events it seems to me I might at least have repeated her monosyllabic eulogies of the masterpieces of nature and the arts. But, I repeat, I have never been an effusive man, and epithets like Superb! Glorious! Gorgeous! Admirable! Exquisite! and so on, I had always connected—

probably because of my convivial associations—with club stories and horses and the young women of the new ballet. They struck me as a bit flat just now.

The climax came here in Venice.

Very late one night we were returning in our gondola from a ride to the lagoon. As we glided into the Grand Canal we suddenly came upon a group of boats illuminated as in carnival time, and gliding very, very slowly toward a palace opposite Santa Maria della Salute. It was a serenade to a lady of the royal house of Austria, who was sojourning here in Venice. An orchestra of strings discoursed music sweeter than that on which Orsino fed his love. The almost maddening melody echoing back and forth between the marble walls that line the Grand Canal! And over all the huge orange-red sphere that passes for a moon in Venice, giving the last touch of seeming unreality to the scene. It was enough to stir the soul of a Cyclops.

"He who can unmoved regard such a vision of unearthly loveliness," began Mrs. Tanqueray with a suddenness that quite startled me, and apropos of nothing but my silence, "who can linger unresponsive amid surroundings of such inspiring grace, who can refrain from bursting forth in gladsome pæans of thanksgiving, he must indeed be——"

"I beg your pardon, my dear," I interrupted, half jokingly and half in irritation; "that sounds terribly like Baedeker, and I protest against a rebuke cribbed word for word from his guidebook."

"Baedeker!" exclaimed Mrs. Tanqueray. "Baedeker!"

"Well, I'll not be so certain about that," I returned; "but if it isn't Baedeker it's 'Mildred Russell's Letters' or Mr. Ruskin's 'St. Mark's Rest'—my life on it, Mrs. Tanqueray."

. . . . .

In the morning we started for England.

IV.

HIGHERCOMBE.

Few of my friends—my former intimates in town—ever ventured more than one visit after we had settled down here in Surrey. Possibly they found the place dull. I rather fancy, though, it was Mrs. Tanqueray's evident dislike to them. The first Mrs. Tanqueray did dislike all my friends, disliked them utterly. And the worst of it was, she was at no pains to conceal her disfavor. She insisted that they were brutish, vicious men who had been my companions-in-sin in the riotous, rakish disorder of my youth and early manhood. So she did her utmost to discourage any further intimacy between us; not from any particular concern in my well-being, but merely to preserve Highercombe from their vitiating presence.

I never could divine where the first Mrs. Tanqueray got the notion of my hopeless wickedness. So far as she could know, my life had been comparatively reputable—as such things go. I could understand how she might misconstrue my conduct in the affair of the

sparkling water and of the Venetian serenade as indicating a temperament unsympathetic and unresponsive. But to be held as a man quite beyond redemption—well, it took some time for me to get used to it.

At first I tried to disabuse her mind of the besetting conviction of my worthlessness. I told her that I had never lost at cards more than I could conveniently pay, had never drank more than I could decorously carry, that I had never wronged any woman. All in all I failed to see wherein my life had been dissolute or infamous. To my protestations, though, Mrs. Tanqueray returned but one answer always.

"Ah, you fail to see it!" she would sigh; "that is the saddest of it all—that you should not be able to understand your own vility. A nature less ignoble than your own would realize what a worm you are, what a——"

At that point I always closed the interview, even by leaving the room if need be. It is not pleasant to be called a worm—not by your first wife, at any rate.

V.

When little Ellean came to us I thought everything would change. I had been told that such episodes often proved epochal in the marital history. But the tot only seemed to bring new cares and woes into Mrs. Tanqueray's life. Me she now judged capable of any meanness. Whatever evil she had ever con-

jured up against me in her turgid imagination she deemed fully justified by this latest exhibition of my villainy.

As for poor Ellean—the child was a ceaseless anxiety to the mother lest it had inherited any of my qualities. Time and again I have heard Mrs. Tanqueray cry out in an access of nervous alarm :

" Oh, if she should prove to be like you ! "

The evident sincerity with which Mrs. Tanqueray recoiled from the prospect of such a possibility came to have its effects on me by and by. I began to wonder and ponder if I really wasn't the ruthless, shameless Minotaur that she proclaimed me. Mrs. Tanqueray had applied herself so persistently and consistently to the work of convincing me of my innate depravity and acquired viciousness that I began in the end to share her opinion of myself. Had the fates spared her I believe she would eventually have brought me to acknowledge that I was a worm.

As Ellean grew in years Mrs. Tanqueray's distress became ever and ever more poignant lest the child should suffer contamination from any influence that I might knowingly or unwittingly exercise upon her. On every possible pretext Ellean was kept out of my presence. Even that did not avail to calm Mrs. Tanqueray's morbid alarms. She confessed that she would have no peace of mind until the girl was out of the house—out of the neighborhood—out of the country—far, far from the remotest danger of contact with me.

So little Ellean, doubtless wondering what it all was about, was sent off to a French school, where the wise abbess said the child looked as if she wanted a wet-nurse rather than instructors.

VI.

I should never have allowed Ellean to be sent away. I should have insisted that she remain at Highercombe and run the chance of the moral contagion that Mrs. Tanqueray so dreaded. The place became unbearable without her.

Matters went steadily from bad to worse between Mrs. Tanqueray and myself. Her imagination played the very deuce with my moral character.

There came a time when I concluded that, by the love I bore my wife, I was bound to free her from so hateful an association. I suggested that we live utterly apart at Highercombe; that each of us occupy a separate portion of the establishment; that we never meet, even at dinner.

"The servants would talk," Mrs. Tanqueray objected.

"Suppose I remove myself to town?"

"What!" cried my wife; "to plunge yourself deeper into the fathomless pits of shame!"

"Then, why not divorce, and done with it?" I returned, quite out of patience.

"Divorce, indeed! So that the whole world may learn to what a monster I linked my life! No, Mr.

Tanqueray, I have given this subject much consideration——"

"I had guessed as much," I could not refrain from interrupting.

"There is but one solution of the miserable problem."

"And that is——"

"One of us should die."

This was said calmly and deliberately, with less asperity than I had ever heard Mrs. Tanqueray bid her maid fetch her hat.

"Is that not rather extreme?" I ventured to ask.

Mrs. Tanqueray replied that to one given over to sins of the flesh and the devil it would doubtless seem so.

"To one," she continued, "whose soul is dead to every impulse save that of sin——"

"Further comment is superfluous," I interrupted. "You have already convinced me. One of us should die. Just how this is to be brought about is not quite clear to me at the moment, but I shall do my best."

For the succeeding six months I did my utmost to oblige Mrs. Tanqueray in the matter. I rode the most fractious horses in the stable, took the stiffest fences in the country, put triple charges in my guns in hope of an explosion, sat in draughts in expectation of pneumonia, smoked Austrian cigars; but to no avail.

One morning Mrs. Tanqueray sent for me.

Waving off any apologies that I might attempt to offer for still lingering on earth, my wife said:

"I see you have no serious intention of dissolving the odious bond that holds me to you. I have decided to take matters into my own hands, for once. I shall die."

And presently she did, too.

VII.

LONDON.

The first Mrs. Tanqueray was beyond all question a good woman—a fearfully good woman. After she had departed this life I recognized her distinguished virtues more than ever. Had she been less perfect morally, perhaps she would not have succeeded in convincing me of my ingrained and consummate wickedness. As it was, the contrast in our two natures, rather than her untiring reference to the fact, brought me to a realization of my sinfulness.

Therein the first Mrs. Tanqueray played a decisive part in my choice of her successor. The memory of the wretchedness that I had brought to her determined me never again to subject a defenseless, unsuspecting woman to the disillusionment that must come from association with such a man as the first Mrs. Tanqueray saw in her mind's eye. So, messieurs my critics, I married Paula Ray—or Mrs. Jermyns, as part of the town knew her. I knew I should not surprise Paula.

About a Lady, a Playwright, and an Actress

About a Lady, a Playwright, and an Actress

I RECALL that I wondered—and worried—after seeing Mr. Jones's play on the subject, whether *Lady Susan Harabin* really did go wrong at Cairo with *Lucien Edensor*.

The author makes no attempt to clear one's mind on the matter; rather, with provoking skill, he piques doubt to the quick from start to finish. It is true that *Lucien* tells us, and tells *Lady Susan*, too—in our hearing—that their flirtation stopped short of scandal: but that of course. Were the truth otherwise he could not confess it, even to the lady herself. *Mrs. Quesnel*, Sue's companion during her two-years' separation from her husband and her only intimate and confidante, assures us that in her opinion the affair was quite innocent—a mere matter of moonshine and *ennui;* North African moonshine and *ennui* at that. But *Mrs. Quesnel's* manner of telling it is far from convincing. And she is a widow, besides—a young widow with a rich suggestion of *savoir-vivre* and Spanish veins. A thousand apologies to *Madame Inez*, but her assurance does not satisfy me.

As for the lady in the case, "the rebellious Susan" of the title—she intimates with maddening insistence,

to her uncles, to her husband, to everybody except, possibly, to *Lucien Edensor*—that she went just as far with this last gentleman as it pleased her to go. And how far that was—"well, that's my affair," says the minx, with a toss of the head, a curl of the lip and a snap of the finger that prove that all the king's horses and all the king's men could not drag the truth from her. The weaker sex—that delicious fallacy of mankind!

To the very end of the story *Lady Susan* clings to this complexion of guilt. Argument, promise, entreaty, are vain to induce her to say—only to say, proof, of course, being out of the question—that those perilous zephyrs of Cairo had not fanned her caprice into sin. The legal cunning of her uncle, *Sir Richard Kato*, cannot cozen that assurance from her. The appeals, the adoration, the tardy oaths of fidelity of *Lady Susan's* husband are no more availing. Even when confronted with the evidence of her lover's treason, with the story of *Edensor's* facile affections transferred to another when scarcely a fortnight out of her presence, she is still the rebellious Susan: pert, mutinous, almost jadish.

"Come, Sue," *Sir Richard* pleads when he would place her hand in *Harabin's* in token of final reconciliation, "give your word to Jim that you have done nothing you need be ashamed of while you have been away from him. He only asks your word for it, Sue."

"And—I—won't—give—it," she retorts bitterly, trying to withdraw her hand; "he may think what he

pleases, but if he would have me back he must take me as I am—that two years and all."

And in the end it is on those terms that *Lady Susan* returns to her husband. One doesn't envy him his future thoughts in the twilight hours or the fancies of a sleepless night.

Why did not Mr. Jones, who plotted "The Case of Rebellious Susan," allow us, at any rate, to go away with the conviction of his heroine's chastity? Why make us share the dreadful misgivings that must inevitably and eternally haunt and harass her husband? We, there on the other side of the footlights, had no part in the flagrant escapade that roused the demon in *Lady Susan* and started her, with the matchless determination of slighted womanhood, in quest of revenge. Is it fair for an author to hold us in love for an entire evening with his fascinating heroine and then send us out into the snow-covered night with serious doubts as to what really did happen over in Cairo?

Surely he might have suffered that plausible story of *Susan's* and *Lucien's* attendance at church on the critical evening to stand unchallenged. We believed it when we heard *Madame Inez* relate to *Sir Richard* how, on a certain occasion, the twain had returned to the hotel at a very, very late hour and blamed their shocking tardiness on the very, very long sermon in the little English church. We believed it even though we knew that the airs in Cairo in the season utterly discourage the preparation of very, very long sermons. *Sir Richard* believed it too; and so did the unfortunate *Mr.*

Harabin; and so did everybody on the stage. But the very next moment the author, with what seems the refinement of cruelty, traps young *Edensor* into a statement that he had never been inside a church in Cairo. Of course the whole story falls to the ground and carries with it the delusion that we were only too anxious to keep by us forever.

Even then one is ready to resist surrender of confidence in *Lady Susan:* but the author, pursuing his purpose undeviatingly, relentlessly, deprives us of the last resort. He robs us of any lingering illusion that we might entertain regarding *Susan's* sentiments toward her husband. If by any trick or surprise, like that put upon Françillon, she were made to discover one last remnant of love that had withstood the shock of his infidelity and the slow but certain alchemy of absence, one could still laugh at her affair with *Edensor.* For a woman like *Lady Susan* does not go to extremes—even for revenge—until love is very dead, as dead as only dead love can be. But, for a purpose that we may presently discern, the author declines to compel his heroine to any such exposition.

So far as her outward manner would show when she is again brought into the presence of her husband, she has given over every emotion that he had ever inspired in her, either for love or hate or anger or resentment. She is merely, utterly and radically indifferent. For her—and her manner has not the consolation of counterfeit—*Harabin* might as well never have lived.

It is that—a murrain on the playwright's cunning!

—that keeps warm the irritating suspicion of that night in Cairo. Having ceased to care for her husband and having come to care very much for *Edensor*—she throws herself into his arms the instant she is alone with him—*Lady Susan* may easily have drifted to great lengths on the moonshine and *ennui* of North Africa.

But in the end—you probably presume—just before the final curtain that traditionally falls on a very June of happiness, *Sue's* errant heart returns to its appointed haven. Then, of course, the author lifts the veil of her pretensions and proves that, after all, her love has only been playing at hide-and-seek and has never been really lost to *Harabin*.

No, not even that conventional comfort does Mr. Jones proffer.

Indeed, he leaves us in doubt whether or not his heroine would ever again have taken up her old life, had not *Edensor* behaved so shabbily.

"Three weeks," she ponders, when she learns that that period had elapsed between his oath of eternal loyalty to her and his betrothal to another, "three—whole—weeks! He must have thought a great deal of me to have remained true all that time."

Then she tosses into the fireplace the bit of wedding-cake that the recreant adorer of Cairo had sent her—what a monstrous impertinence! One is half inclined to believe that such a bungler missed his good fortune after all—and then, for the first time, the rebellious little lady will listen to propositions of recon-

ciliation with her husband. She never dreamed of going back to Mayfair until *Edensor's* slight shut the gates of Arcady against her.

Some men might hesitate to accept a wife who had gone a-wandering and who returns as unrepentant, unyielding and almost churlish as *Lady Susan* does. The utmost that she vouchsafes in the way of future affection is that she will try to be kind. From *Harabin* she exacts a promise, a promise on his word of honor as a gentleman, that he will be true to her for the rest of his days. In return she asserts—merely asserts: "I will be a good wife to you, Jim."

And Jim—poor tortured Jim—pledges that he will be a good husband.

A pair of the prettiest pink arms in the world twine about Jim's neck, a Rosalind-face nestles lightly on his shoulder. At last! one says to one's self. She will end his frightful doubts: tell him that she adores him and that in her heart of hearts there has never been a place for any man but him. That evening at Cairo she really *did* go to the little English church, and the sermon *was* very, very long!

You wait confidently for those words when *Lady Susan* opens her lips to speak. You hear instead that which is the final tantalization:

"Ah, love me, Jim," she half pleads, half commands. "I do so want to be loved."

Naturally enough! the cruel thought occurs to me. With *Lucien Edensor* married away off there in one of the colonies and with the memory of that inept sou-

venir of the wedding-cake, of course my lady wants to be loved. And *James Harabin* had better not flatter himself over-much because she turns to him for the favor. His wife has learned a dangerous lesson. For two years—an eternity in such affairs—he was the "superfluous" man in her happiness. That is a large price for *Mr. Harabin* to pay for his little excursion into illicit diversion—a larger price, perhaps, than the author need have exacted from him in order to satisfy the average theatre-goer—a far larger price even than M. Dumas demands from the husband of Françillon, who went no further with the chance agent of her mock revenge than a supper in a *cabinet-particulier*.

Might not the lesson of the reciprocal obligation of man and wife have been sent as straight home in some other way than that employed by Henry Arthur Jones?

If the author had been content to satisfy tradition—yes; but since he chose to satisfy truth—no.

Truth, though the heavens fall! That, obviously, is the art-shibboleth of the man who wrote "The Case of Rebellious Susan." He makes no terms with the prejudices of the general, with convention, with hypocrisy. Verity, reality is his god, and at the shrine of his deity he lays the fondest conceits of his craft. Never does he diverge an iota from the absolute logic of his theme; nor does he seek to evade the paltriest consequence of his premises, be it never so perilous to the favor of his device. If *Lady Susan Harabin* did go wrong with *Lucien Edensor*, the author seems to say to his audience, the blame is not mine nor yours, but her

husband's. Let him bear the brunt of the tragedy. If he would venture to trifle with a proud, sensitive, highstrung woman like *Lady Susan*, why should I or you quarrel with the event? He, apparently, can endure the thought of the possibilities of that night in Cairo—why should we recoil from it? He is willing to confront the future with his wife: burning with eagerness to forget everything—or at any rate to try to forget it.

And yet in the face of that fact we persist in worrying over the possibilities of just one moment in *Lady Susan's* past!

Can it be that we are more seriously in love with *Mr. Harabin's* wife than he himself was? Or *Lucien Edensor*, either? Would we take that charming creature back unless she gave us her solemn word that she had not taken that last final step that counts? And even then should we not have accursed doubts? When we caught *Lady Susan* humming dreamily some tune or song that she had learned in that two years of separation, or gazing pensively at some picture of the East—what frightful fancies would come to one! Perhaps one should not care so much if *Lady Susan* were something less sweet and captivating than Mr. Jones has painted her. A more appealing and seductive picture does not hang in the contemporary theatre. "*Jim*" *Harabin's* wife will live in the memory of men with the most delicious fancies of scenic genius—surpassed in beauty, spirit, wit and sympathy by but few of Shakespeare's women.

Some part of the consummate charm of the character as presented on Daniel Frohman's stage inhered, possibly, in the presence and manner of Isabel Irving. In regarding Mr. Jones's work, I sought persistently to keep out of the critical eye the exquisite image and the gracious ravishments of the actress impersonating the chief rôle. But I do not hesitate to admit that Miss Irving surpassed ready imagination of the ideal personality for the author's creation. To me she seemed as if she had stepped fresh from the perfumed vellum of a King Charles poet. Such saucy airs, stately impudence, and pathetic witcheries! What a figure for Herrick to celebrate! Somehow it was his verses that occurred to me with every new exposition of Miss Irving's grace and charm. The very defects of her mimetic qualities brought back his compliment to careless——

> A winning wave, deserving note,
> In the tempestuous petticoat;
> A careless shoe-string in whose tie
> I see a wild civility;
> Do more bewitch me than when art
> Is too precise in every part.

Some More of Those Misunderstood Women

Some More of Those Misunderstood Women

THEY had been listening to Mr. Pinero's sermon on the advisability of always giving "The Benefit of the Doubt" to a woman who has been so indiscreet that no one but the other person can ever really know the truth about matters. They had come away from the amazingly brilliant play with absolutely opposite notions regarding the chief characters. This, despite the fact that they were married and always held the same views on all subjects except those on which they had the same information. In *her* opinion poor little Mrs. Fraser was a monstrously abused woman—perfectly justified in running away from her husband and offering to elope with her married "chum" Jack Allingham, when the husband intimated that he was somewhat upset by the part that his wife had played as co-respondent in the Allingham divorce case, and by the grudging recommendation of the Judge that Mrs. Fraser be awarded "The Benefit of the Doubt." In *his* opinion Mr. Fraser had been outrageously used and was fully entitled to the satisfaction of being unhappy over his wife's disgrace. In *her* opinion, Fraser —"Fraser of Locheen"—was a stupid, irritating, sus-

picious bore, who drove his wife to folly because he could not understand her. In *his* opinion, Fraser was about the only respectable person in the play—excepting, of course, the Bishop of St. Olpherts and his wife; and as for his being suspicious—well, the husband of a lady who picks up her cavalier-servant on her way home from a dance and entertains him until four o'clock in the morning——"

"Three o'clock, if you please, not four—that was proved in the trial."

"Three o'clock, then, if you like——"

"If I like! Why, even Mrs. Allingham's counsel admitted that the plaintiff's spies had made a mistake. It was three o'clock when Allingham left the Frasers' house. And that's just the way the poor little thing was baited and slandered all the way through. Four o'clock, indeed! You men can never understand a woman like Mrs. Fraser."

Now, at that point—and it is always reached at a very early stage of the controversy—all such discussions should end. Half the troubles of this world would die in their infancy if men were wise enough to recognize the finality of that argument—"you men can never understand a woman like Mrs. ——." Never mind the name: it doesn't count.

"But you said the same thing of that woman in 'The Liars'—Lady Jessica Neapean—and of Mrs. Ebbsmith," he persisted, instead of following the prudent plan—"of the perfectly obvious Mrs. Ebbsmith."

"Yes, and I repeat the advice I gave you then: I shouldn't write anything about the notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith, if I were you."

"Delightful suggestion. You know how firmly I'm convinced of the fatuity of dramatic criticism—but how evade discussion of such a notable theatric figure? What excuse for it, pray?"

"The best excuse in the world——"

"You mean that the theme is rather—rather—well, say 'high,' for polite pages?"

"Oh, no; your paper printed a portrait of the Princess Chimay only last week—I'm afraid you couldn't justify *that* excuse. No; what I had in mind was that—oh, well, if you must write about it, write about the actors. Or about the technical skill of the playwright, or the beauty of the stage-setting, or the—well, write about anything except Mrs. Ebbsmith!"

"But Mrs. Ebbsmith is the play—it would be like——"

"Yes, I know—like a criticism of 'Hamlet' without reference to Hamlet. Still, I repeat, in the case of Mrs. Ebbsmith there is the best excuse in the world for writing nothing about her."

"Still, I repeat, the omission requires proffer of an excuse. Come, let's know it, if only in justice to Mrs. Ebbsmith."

"Well, then, since you will—you will be sure to do it badly."

"That is certainly the best reason in the world for not doing it at all—conclusive, decisive and discourag-

ing, but too piquant not to invite protest, if only in justice, this time, to——"

"Oh, I only meant that no man could write understandingly and sympathetically about Mrs. Ebbsmith."

"Ah, indeed! Well, I think her a very commonplace person."

"There—you see? I told you so! At the very beginning—out of your own mouth—you prove the wisdom of my advice. You think Mrs. Ebbsmith 'commonplace,' and as a matter of course you would have fallen into commonplace errors in discussing her and her conduct."

"When I say 'commonplace,' I don't mean that one meets women like Mrs. Ebbsmith every day and everywhere—Heaven forbid! But the type—that's commonplace to the last degree. The canny old Duke of St. Olpherts recognized it at a glance—the moment he saw it 'affinitizing'—you must admit violent euphemisms in such delicate subjects—with his promising nephew, in the most dangerously romantic place in the world. St. Olpherts had no illusions about Mrs. Ebbsmith. He knew precisely how to deal with her."

"I beg your pardon, but that's precisely what he didn't know, and that's why the play ends so vaguely and weakly and unsatisfactorily. Neither St. Olpherts nor you nor any other man could appreciate Mrs. Ebbsmith, or understand her or sympathize with her. She is essentially a woman's woman."

"That is just what she isn't. She is essentially a man's woman. You may be sure Mr. Ebbsmith found

her so—the fortunate Mr. Ebbsmith who dissipates into oblivion long before Mr. Pinero raises the curtain on the play. The scamp who treated her—according to her story—'first like a woman of the harem and then like a beast of burden.' And Lucas Cleeve found her a man's woman—Cleeve, whom Mrs. Ebbsmith, in the jaunty cap and tidy apron of a hospital nurse, coaxed from the grasp of the Roman fever only to take him to her own. And St. Olpherts——"

"Well, you are getting on. You surely won't pretend that he understood Mrs. Ebbsmith!—St. Olpherts!—that selfish, calculating, sensual, cynical, shattered, burnt-out old *roué* who——"

"Who understood Mrs. Ebbsmith better than any of the others—better than you or I—who appreciated her, too, at her real value—from the moment she showed her self-poise and her fine shoulders above the ample *décolleté* of a gorgeous dinner-gown. St. Olpherts knew her for a man's woman by the blush of pride with which she heard his compliments on her improved appearance, by the gleam of startled vanity with which she noted Cleeve's surprise, by the dismay with which she divined the cooling of Cleeve's infatuation."

"Ah—isn't that just like a man! To think that he can sound the depth of a woman's soul from such paltry, obvious, superficial signs as vanity, pride, jealousy—the merest accidents of her sex—the defects of her qualities, her womanly qualities—the purely matter-of-fact attributes of her femininity. See here, you main-

tain that Ebbsmith, Cleeve, St. Olpherts understood Pinero's heroine, do you?"

"H'm—yes—but with this qualification: they understood her to the extent of understanding that women like Mrs. Ebbsmith are beyond being understood; that is, by mortals."

"By male mortals, yes. So you are half right. But with us others it is different. And I can prove it to you. You will admit, I suppose, that one cannot control that which one does not understand."

"Assuredly."

"Ebbsmith did not control his wife, did he?"

"She ran away from him, if that is what you mean."

"Lucas Cleeve lost her when he most wanted her, did he not?"

"As far as we can tell from Mr. Pinero's play, yes. But who knows that after——"

"No—I will not admit that impudent suspicion. And that wonderfully wise and tactful St. Olpherts—does he persuade Mrs. Ebbsmith to accept the disgraceful station that is to solve his nephew's domestic, social and political difficulties—'the suburban villa,' as the wretch describes it, 'the *ménage à la mode* and all that sort of thing'?"

"Mrs. Ebbsmith certainly inclined for a time to yield to these terms."

"Yes, but in the end whose influence ruled? Who convinces Mrs. Ebbsmith of the evil of her ways? Who induces her to have done with Cleeve, Mrs. Cleeve, St. Olpherts, and the rest of the demoralizing

crew? Who is it that arouses her to the horror of 'a moral woman living immorally'?"

"Of course you expect me to answer that it was a woman—her friend—Mrs. Thorpe."

"How else could you answer?"

"And you expect me to admit, too, that Mrs. Thorpe dominated Mrs. Ebbsmith in this particular crisis of her life—women like Mrs. Ebbsmith have quite a number of 'em—because she understood her—as only a woman could—and sympathized with her in that degree that is possible only under conditions of complete understanding. That is the trap you set for me, isn't it?"

"There's the man again. A woman leads him to the truth; he cries that she's lured him to a trap. 'She beguiled me'—you'll never get rid of the old Adam. Come, be brave enough to admit that it is the woman, Mrs. Thorpe, to whom Pinero's tortured heroine turns at last for sympathy and rest."

"Sympathy—no; rest—that I grant you."

"Then it was for nothing but rest—common physical, everyday rest—that that splendid, self-sacrificing, exalted creature threw over love, ambition, passion, everything, to bury herself in a village parsonage?"

"Precisely. The poor lady was tired—that's all. She went down to the country with her virtuous but wearisome friends for much the same reason that she turned hospital nurse. All of us—men and women—good and bad—are seized with it now and then—with 'that tired feeling.' And you may be quite sure that

as soon as the notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith has pulled herself together—got her nerves back, and her looks —she will be in town again—as 'notorious' as ever. Mr. Pinero knows it, too, and with all his skill he can't prevent his audience from suspecting the fact."

"Mr. Pinero with all his skill is only a man. And he understands Mrs. Ebbsmith just about as little as did her husband or Cleeve or the Duke of St. Olpherts. That is why he fails to brings out sufficiently the horrible, awful shock with which his heroine hears the hideous sacrifice that Cleeve asks of her. It is not in the nature of things, I tell you, for any man to realize that woman's feelings when she discovers the real character of Cleeve's sentiment for her, when she hears from the lips of a man whom she idolizes as something purer, gentler and more nearly angelic than anything that ever before came into her life, the monstrous suggestion that——"

"That she should comb her hair and put on a clean gown. Now, really, wasn't that the 'hideous sacrifice' that Cleeve asked of Mrs. Ebbsmith? Wasn't that the 'monstrous suggestion' that she—and you—construed into a 'horrible, awful shock' to her womanhood?"

"No; the shock lay in the suddenly awakened consciousness that Cleeve thought of her as he would of any ordinary woman who took up life with him under conditions that a vulgar, narrow-minded conventionality condemns. It crushed her to find that he

was content to have her be to him a 'mere woman,' as she herself expresses it."

"There you do Cleeve a great injustice. He distinctly tells the lady that he is eager and anxious to work with her in putting the world to rights; but he also says bluntly that he sees no reason why such altruistic, philanthropic enterprises compel her to a condition of persistent slovenliness."

"He should have shut his eyes to such material details in the presence of an angel."

"An angel with straggly, unkempt locks and very dirty wings."

"But who lived in the clouds for all that."

"Yes, in clouds wrought by hysteria or morphia, or possibly only brandy."

"Come, come, that's a bit too much. The author doesn't give the faintest suggestion of such things."

"Indeed, he does—in a score of little ways. That goblet of wine that Mrs. Ebbsmith drains at a single draught, that cigarette that she holds and puffs with the grace and familiarity of a—a—well, what you please—the tell-tale swagger that she puts on along with the hetaira gown—and, most convincing of all, that episode of the Bible thrown into the blazing fire and then frantically withdrawn. If that isn't hysteria, it is something worse—morphia."

"And—you—were—not—thrilled by that scene?"

"No more than I should be thrilled by any of the other infinity of tantrums to which such women as Mrs. Ebbsmith are inclined. It was a vulgar, vicious dis-

play of bad temper—enough to cure Cleeve of his infatuation, even if the uncombed hair and musty flannel wrapper hadn't already done the work."

"How you will come back to those trivialities—the accidents of birth and breeding—circumstances over which one has absolutely no control! You seem to forget poor Mrs. Ebbsmith's early life, her struggles with poverty, her revolt against society—the fire and daring that made men call her 'Mad Agnes'——"

"And very much better business she was in in those days—a vast deal better than when she took to 'housekeeping' with another woman's husband and excused her conduct on the score of Plato and a dusty Mother-Hubbard. Upon my word, I have a genuine admiration for 'Mad Agnes' consorting with that frowsy crew down there in Carter Street and railing in her wild, maudlin, futile way against wealth and power and frivolity and all the rest of the grapes that we call sour when we can't have them. A man can understand that sort of thing——"

"Yes, that sort of thing a man can understand. But the finer, subtler, psychic sentiments that rule a woman in such an affair as that between Mrs. Ebbsmith and Lucas Cleeve——"

"And between Jack Allingham and Mrs. Fraser, eh? And between that other pair in 'The Liars?'"

"It isn't a question of a particular case. Mrs. Fraser, Lady Jessica, Mrs. Ebbsmith, the rebellious Susan Harabin, Mrs. Tanqueray—they are one and all too much for the masculine mind. You can no more

understand their heart-promptings, their soul-throbs, the real purity of their instincts, than you can understand the full significance of a mother's love for the child."

"Which suggests, by the way, that none of the precious lot you've just mentioned appears to know anything about that particular emotion. Clever fellow, Mr. Pinero. He doesn't confuse the issue by the introduction of the maternal sentiment. His heroine is never a Mother, only a Woman. You may be sure he's been a close student of that wonderful essay that Dumas wrote in defense of *L'Ami des Femmes*."

"Oh, I'm much obliged for the reference. In that very same essay, Dumas, even Dumas, admits that there are women that he can't understand."

"But I doubt that he would have included Mrs. Ebbsmith or Mrs. Tanqueray in the category. In Paris they know the type intimately—have known it for half a century—in their theatre and in their fiction. Here, and in London too, it is still a dubious novelty in drama and literature. That's why you—and a good many others—think Mrs. Ebbsmith a rarefied, mystic, complex entity, when, as a matter of fact, she is a quite commonplace mortal with some bad moments and some good ones."

"And it is the 'good moments' in such a woman that neither you and nor any other man can grasp and appreciate at their full. The 'bad moments' you understand well enough—the cigarettes and champagne and careless corsage. Pinero and the others of his guild

can handle a heroine beautifully, as long as they can contrive to keep those precious factors dominant. But when the psychic revolution comes—they give it up. They drop the curtain. The best they can do—dramatically, theatrically, morally—is to send the audience away guessing."

"It isn't the dramatist—it is the Mrs. Ebbsmiths and the Mrs. Frasers and the Mrs. Tanquerays that cause the 'guessing': Pinero and his kind merely transcribe reality."

"Reality as they see it—a coarse, material, masculine reality. That is why such a play as 'The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith' ends as it does——"

"It ends as it should end. It ends 'vaguely, weakly, unsatisfactorily,' as you say, because in real life such affairs as that between Cleeve and Mrs. Ebbsmith end in just that way—vaguely, weakly, unsatisfactorily. The man goes back to duty and decency; the woman goes to——"

"Pray, be careful."

"You needn't put your hands over your ears. Where the woman goes depends entirely on the character of the next man she falls in with. But wherever she goes she doesn't stay there very long—you may depend upon that. I give your Mrs. Ebbsmith three months with her well-meaning friends at the country parsonage—not more than that. She's back in London now; Mr. Pinero will tell you so if you ask him."

"Well, if she is, she can thank Mr. Pinero for it. He

could easily have arranged marriage between her and Cleeve."

"Ah, that is what you would call a satisfying disposition of the lady?"

"You will grant that it would send the audience home in a much more contented frame of mind."

"Doubtless; but it would destroy the purpose of the play. The author occupies himself with the problem of a man and woman who undertake to defy the social institution of marriage. The pair come to grief —just as they do in real life. Now, in order to avoid the *dénouement* that you—and the public, presumably, for evidently they don't like the play—deem vague, weak and unsatisfactory, you propose that Cleeve and Mrs. Ebbsmith should marry."

"It is the least that Cleeve can do."

"But the very thing that he and Mrs. Ebbsmith started out not to do. When that happens, you no longer have any problem. Or, rather, the problem rounds on itself—and ceases the pursuit of truth. If the play ended in wedlock, it would have no honest purpose and no right of existence. The tragedy is its only justification."

"If that argument were final there would be no excuse for 'The Benefit of the Doubt' or for 'The Liars'—there is no tragedy there."

"Indeed there is, the most hopeless tragedy of all —only you haven't guessed it."

A Play that Was Done on the Bowery

A Play that Was Done on the Bowery

WHO is this man Gerhart Hauptmann that he should write such a play as "The Weavers"? By what prerogative does he take it upon himself to give the world—a careless, easy-going, sun-loving world—such a saddening, humiliating, reproachful picture of hopeless poverty? Is it that he is a mere playmaker seeking tremendous effects from awful truths? Is he a philosopher or economist exploiting, through the medium of a skillful drama, theories of capital's obligations to labor? Or is he, like Johann Most and his friends who produced "The Weavers" at the Bowery Theatre, a confessed anarchist, a possible bomb-thrower? Did Hauptmann write this play to entertain the public and grow rich on the royalties of their patronage? Or did he purpose that it should arouse the general conscience to a sense of monstrous cruelty that in some instances and in some places—Silesia, for example—drives the poor to revolt?

Be his motive what it may, the average playgoer will protest against "The Weavers" in particular and all such works in general. The world has no use for them. They put lines into the face of him who studies them, sorrow into the soul, pity into the heart.

What good any of these? It is not pleasant to have lines in the face. And sorrow and pity are as the writing on the wall, as the ghosts at the banquet—the figure of the Commander at the feast of Don Juan. Eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow we die—that is the rational morale of living. But such men as Hauptmann would have us concern ourselves with the sufferings of others; they would have us pause in the merriment of existence to listen to stories of hunger, rags and thankless toil. With the skill of the consummate artist and the fire of the prophet, they bring before us grewsome visions, ugly, horrifying, of a phase of life of which one need know nothing. It is wrong, all wrong. It destroys one's comfort, peace of mind, and puts a touch of gray or black where all might have been rose-color. The world isn't grateful to men who do that sort of thing. The German Emperor revoked the state subsidy formerly enjoyed by the Deutsches Theater in Berlin because of the presentation in that house of this very play of "The Weavers." And, imitating his example in a way, the police of Newark, New Jersey, prohibited a performance of the play on a recent occasion. The world must approve these procedures. The German Emperor and the police of Newark, New Jersey, know what is good for mankind.

There are no fine speeches in "The Weavers"; no sonorous philippics against Capital, no ecstatic apostrophes to Labor. Hauptmann makes no reference, even the most indirect, to division of profits, or un-

earned increment, or communal advantages. Even the employers who figure in his drama, *Dreissiger* and *Dittrichen*, are not bad men, according to their lights; merely coarse, vulgar, stupid, stolid, grossly sensuous, selfish men—as almost all prosperous Germans are. It is, in the main, simply a picture of life in a provinical manufacturing town that Hauptmann asks us to regard. For the eventual tragedy he is not responsible. That was the outcome, inevitably, of the existing conditions over which he had no control. In logic and reason, he could not evade the exposition of the catastrophe.

Hauptmann himself told me that "Die Weber" is based on an incident of historical record—the uprising of the weavers in a Silesian village some fifty years ago. The chief episodes in the play were related to him by his grandfather, one of the participants in that half-crazy revolt of misery.

To look at the wretched people crowded into the outer office of *Dreissiger's* factory, one would never suppose them capable of such sturdy violence as subsequently animates them. Deathly pale men, women, and children: hollow-eyed, stoop-shouldered, tottering as they move. They fairly sneak to the cashier's desk to receive the few pennies due them for their week's work, each drawing himself together as if conscious that he really has no place on earth and is suffered to remain only in consideration of contracting himself into the smallest possible compass.

They take their miserable pittances with pitiable

humility, making no other protest against imposition than an occasional whine or a sob-choked entreaty for an advance of four or five cents on the next week's wages. Only one of the workmen, *Becker*, a youth whose splendid natural vitality has not yet yielded to the merciless conditions of his task, ventures to grumble.

"Becker, forty-one and a half cents," cries the clerk *Pfeifer*.

Becker (*to his companions*)—That isn't wages—that's drink-money—nothing more. For that a man should work from sunrise to midnight! A fellow should bend over the wheel eighteen days, choked with dust and faint from hunger—to earn forty-one and a half cents. . .

Pfeifer—Here, you, no grumbling. Mouth shut!

Becker—You can't make me shut my mouth, you.

Pfeifer—Oh, I'll see about that. (*Going to door and calling.*) Herr Dreissiger, Herr Dreissiger—will you be so good as to come here for a minute?

Dreissiger (*at the door*)—Well—what is it?

Pfeifer—Becker there says I can't make him shut his mouth.

Dreissiger—Indeed—Becker, eh. Is that he?

Becker—Yes, this is he, Herr Dreissiger—and that's you.

Dreissiger (*shouting*)—Will you shut up—or I'll——

Becker—You needn't shout at me—I'm not deaf.

Dreissiger—Another word and I send for the police.

With such as you I'm soon done. You'll not be the first I've got away with.

Becker—O, that I can believe, easy enough. Such an upright, generous employer as you—he gets away with two or three hundred weavers before his reckoning comes.

Dreissiger—That creature doesn't get another stroke of work from me—remember, Pfeifer.

Becker—Much I care—whether I starve at the loom or in the gutter.

Dreissiger—Be off! Get out of here!

Becker—Yes—when I get what's coming to me.

Dreissiger—What's due this loafer, Neumann?

Neumann—Forty-one and a half cents.

Dreissiger (*takes the money from the cashier and throws it on the counter; a coin falls to the floor*)—There—now get—out of my sight.

Becker (*stolidly*)—When I get what's due me.

Dreissiger—There it lies—and if you don't get out of here in about one second—I'll show you.

Becker—My wages first—in my hand, I tell you—that's where they belong.

Dreissiger—Someone give him his money—— (*A clerk puts the money in Becker's hand.*)

Becker (*airily*)—Ah, that's better—everything in form, gentlemen.

At this moment one of the crowd of weavers utters a faint cry and falls to the floor. It is a lad who has walked from a distant village, half bent to the ground under a burden that would weary a dray-horse, to

bring his parents' stint of work and get the twenty-seven cents due them.

"Give him air," the women cry, "water!" "Yes, water," echoes *Dreissiger*, really touched by the boy's sufferings—"or some cognac, Pfeifer, give him some cognac."

"Give him something to eat," sneers *Becker* for a parting shot—"that 'll bring him around quick enough."

Hunger, starvation—that is the theme of "Die Weber" from beginning to end: the demoralization that comes from thin blood, flabby muscles, weak heart; the madness of famine, the rage and crazy despair of the empty stomach.

The weavers don't complain of it—that is what makes it all so terrible and wildly impressive. They seem utterly unconscious of the fact that there is such a thing in the whole world as wholesome food.

Here is a scene in the house of *Baumert*, a weaver of long service. *Jager*, a reserve, has just come back to his native village, after having given the best years of his life to the glory of the King of Prussia. He goes from house to house, parading his uniform, his silver watch, and ten dollars—ten entire dollars!—that he has brought from his enforced service in the army. He tells the people that in the cities the very dogs live better than they themselves do here in Kaschbach.

Baumert—O, we have a bit of luck ourselves now and then. Don't you remember, mother, that we had some stewed meat not so very long ago? One of

these days fate will send a dog our way again—of course, that sort of thing can't happen every day.

Ansorge—You didn't slaughter poor little Amien?

Baumert—It was that or starve, my good Ansorge.

Ansorge—My, my, my.

Mother Baumert—And he was such a nice, well-behaved little dog.

Jager—Are you all as crazy over dog-stew as you used to be?

Baumert—If we could only get enough of it!

Mother Baumert—There are worse things, too.

Baumert—Why, Jager, have you lost your appetite for dog-stew? You stop here with us long enough and it 'll come back to you.

Jager shakes his head dubiously. He's been spoiled for that sort of thing. The German Emperor and the Newark police know the perils of excessive education.

They seat themselves at the table. In honor of *Jager's* visit *Baumert* has bought a piece of meat. He is so impatient to taste of it that his wife must reprove his bad manners. "But it is the first time in two years," *Baumert* explains, trembling with excitement, "that we have had meat from the butcher's." After a few bites, *Baumert* turns pale and totters from the table to the open door.

The playwright, with almost brutal candor, leaves no doubt as to the cause of the old weaver's illness.

"Father isn't used to meat," the daughter says apologetically to *Jager*; "he can't stand it."

"Now, look at that," the mother whines; "it won't even stay with him—all that good food wasted."

Baumert (*returning to his place and bursting into tears*)—Ah—it will soon be all over with me. This is what I've come to—to grind and toil for a bit of food that I haven't strength to——

Jager, the soldier, jumps to his feet. "These things must end!" he cries. "Becker and I—we know what to do." He recites to them the ringing song of the weavers—the battle-cry of the miserable. "Skin and shirt, that's what you have for your toil," he shouts, repeating the refrain of the song, "skin and shirt."

"That's truth," old *Baumert* cries, "skin and shirt. Look at me," he goes on between choking sobs: "here I am, Robert Baumert, weaver of Kaschbach. Who can step forward and deny that I have been a good man all my life? What have I for it? Look at me—What sort of a beast am I? What have they done to me—that Satan's brood? Bent and twisted and deformed me."

Ansorge—And it's got to change now, now. We'll endure it no more—come what may, we'll endure it no more.

And they set to work to correct the evil in a manner not wholly unknown to us here, a very great distance from Silesia. They go to *Welzel's* inn and pour bier and brannt-wein into their empty stomachs and talk over their grievances and gradually grow frenzied at the mention of *Dreissiger's* name and *Dittrichen's* and sing in chorus that wonderful song of the weavers.

And finally they are ready for any folly, any violence, any tragedy, even unto death.

Is that not the way misery usually conducts its campaign against the source of its evils?

For my own part I do not believe it is a good way. It lacks organization, providence, and above all the chance of success. Perhaps, though, those qualities are not to be expected in the circumstances.

That is the point of view of young *Weinhold*, the private tutor in *Dreissiger's* household. In the company assembled for a whist-party at the mill-owner's is the village pastor, *Kittelhaus*, a good man, but a religionist by profession. The talk falls, of course, on the unrest and growing impudence of the weavers. Through the open windows comes the pregnant song of the people's wrongs.

Kittelhaus—When will this misconduct end? I tell you it is time the police took a hand. Look out of the window there, Weinhold—see, it isn't only the young fellows who are in this thing, but old men and the women, too. Persons who for years and years we thought respectable and God-fearing—they're as bad as any of them. They trample God's commands in the dust. Now, what have you to say for such creatures?

Weinhold—I have to say that they are starving, half-mad creatures. They give utterance to their wretchedness as best they can—as they understand it. I don't expect such people as that——

It were folly to expect anything within reason of

the weavers now! The bonds that generations of ignorant oppression had almost incorporated into their very flesh were severed and lifted as if by magic. With the song of *Jager* and *Becker* on their lips, they break in upon *Dreissiger* and his guests. Such a scene as Hauptmann has painted here! As dreadful as anything in the French revolution, in its exhibition of men and woman at once depraved, exalted, silly, bloodthirsty: laughing, crying, hysterical beasts—monkeys, tigers, hyenas—and yet, the infinite pity of it all, merely human beings brutalized by the infernal cruelties of their surroundings.

In the end, of course, the soldiers come—as usual. They shoot true, and hundreds of weavers bite the dust and spill their poor souls on the village pavement. But their struggle has not been without its rewards. "See, Hilse," says *Baumert*, gloating over the memory of his share of the loot, "a man must have a little happiness once in a lifetime! Look at me! How do I strike you? A man must have some enjoyment. Don't I look like a count? (*Hitting himself on the stomach.*) What do you think I've got in there, eh? Food, Hilse, food! Food for a baron, Hilse, food for a King—champagne and rabbit-stew? Think of it!"

Baumert had tasted for once of some of the decencies of living, and now death might come when it pleased.

Beneath the windows of *Hilse's* attic the weavers make their last stand.

"Load, aim, fire!"—one hears without, above the cries of the rebels. Then follows the crack of a hundred guns.

Gottlieb Hilse (*seizing an ax*)—What, what! Are we mad dogs? We must eat powder and lead because we ask for bread! Our mothers, sisters, sweethearts must be shot down? O, it's too much, father—I am going——

The Father—Gottlieb, Gottlieb, my son!

The Mother—Where is he going?

The Father—To hell, mother.

Voices from an adjoining room—The soldiers are loading again. Away from the window, father Hilse.

The Father (*seated at his loom*)—Not I! And you cannot force me—any or all of you. Here the Heavenly Father has put me—Isn't it true, mother? Here we stay and do our task, though the skies fall.

He begins to weave. A salvo of gunshots shatters the window by which he is sitting. He rises an instant from his loom: then falls back on the bench, dead, but still holding the webs.

The Mother—Father, father, what ails you?

Silence for a moment, while the wife busies herself with some trivial cares.

Little Mielchen (*rushing in*)—Grandpa, grandpa—they have driven the soldiers out of the castle—the weavers are burning Dittrichen's house—just as they did Dreissiger's, grandpa.

The Mother—Come, husband, say something; you look as though you were afraid.

Curtain! What fearless, almost fiendish significance in those last words, seemingly so innocent—"you look as though you were afraid"!

"The Great Galeoto"

"The Great Galeoto"

THAT one of the very greatest of modern plays should have waited fifteen years and more for presentation before an American audience may be dismissed without comment as one of the mysterious phenomena of the contemporary stage. That its production, even after that interval, should have been left to an institution with the necessarily scant equipment of the Criterion Independent Theatre, likewise carries its own lesson.

Most sensate students of the drama have long been cognizant of the poetic beauty and theatric power of "El Gran Galeoto." Many have striven, in vain of course, to convince managers and actors of authority of the peculiar allurements of this most human and vital and universal of José Echegaray's plays. Translations, adaptations, versions, a score of them, have pleaded for hearing. The late, or rather belated, Mr. Palmer held one of them in his desk throughout the entire period of his conduct of the present Wallack's Theatre; but he could see no certain merits in the work, and flouted it for a succession of feeble fribbles that finally brought his régime to ruin. With other managers even less timorous "The Great Galeoto" fared no better.

Starring actors when at wits' ends for an enterprise of novelty and serious interest were directed to this patent potency. They invariably passed it over, because—but who does not know the myriad of foolish, stupid, maddening objections that starring actors can oppose to a play superb in itself! When Mrs. Potter, writing from Van Diemen's Land, or New Zealand, or Mashonaland, or some other point on the far side of the earth, asked me to suggest some work in which she and Mr. Bellew might make a fresh hazard of the American stage in a manner to command as well as to deserve attention, I answered with the haste of perfect confidence: "Galeoto." But they became enamored of the trumpery "Le Collier de la Reine" —probably because the beautiful actress could wear picture-hats and farthingales, and croon mawkish heroics and highfalutin nonsense—and the play which, for divers reasons, was particularly adapted for their prosperous employment, yielded to rubbish in costume. Georgia Cayvan might have saved her little wreath of laurel from the dust of obscurity, had she perceived the superiority of "The Great Galeoto"; but, no, she preferred the spinal-curvature school of domestic drama and went to the wall with "Mary Pennington, Spinster." An actor of some popularity and more romantic ambitions dismissed the play from his serious consideration "because it has no comedy element"; and rather than risk fate with a play that has no comedy element he took to reciting Poe's "Raven" with a hooded shawl and an educated crow.

in the vaudeville halls. Many and varied instances of similar complexion start to prove—what, after all, has been proved time and time again. When the Criterion Independent Theatre made discovery to the general of the magnificent possibilities of "The Great Galeoto" I fancied the professional factors of the theatre would jostle for precedence in presenting the work on the regular boards.

Where, in all the range of the modern drama, is there a play that surpasses this product of Echegaray's genius in universal interest of theme? The subtle, insidious, inevitable mischief of scandal—under what sun, among what men, in what caste of life, in what conditions of intelligence and thought would that subject want appeal and sympathy? What more tremendous and thrilling motive than the exposition of a tragedy wrought by the merest trifles—a glance, a shrug of the shoulders, a careless word of gossip, a flippant allusion? A man and woman thrown into each other's arms, utterly despite themselves, by the fiendish prowess of such bagatelles! The arch passion flaming up in quiescent souls that, unfanned by scandal, would have flickered on forever, harmlessly, innocently, in ignorance of their latent sentiments.

That is the story of "The Great Galeoto"—a drama so quick, so vital, so moving in its own palpitating fiber, that it fairly acts itself. Surely it will not relapse into lasting desuetude after the seven performances given by the Criterion Independent Theatre.

It lends itself so easily, so eagerly, to adaptation into

a form in which it must attract and delight the promiscuous body of theatre-goers. Venice should be its scene in the version that most appeals to me, possibly because it is the one that I myself devised. The golden moonlight of the Adriatic, the silent, somber gondolas, the twinkle of lights on the misty waters, music that sounds nowhere else as it echoes between the marble walls of the Grand Canal—that is the ambiency of *Ernesto* and *Cristina* as I have always imagined it.

And then the groups of idlers before the cafés that line the quay-side of the Piazza San Marco! The swaggering officers, the oddly dressed fops, the legation underlings, all the chattering, prattering, tittle-tattling dawdlers of the town, who stare at every passer-by and throw after some quip that runs the length of the square before the victim can reach the other end. What a "setting" for the quarrel between *Ernesto* and *Nebreda:* the light mention of *Cristina's* name that reaches *Ernesto's* ear; the angry protest, a blow, and the challenge.

Echegaray concerns himself but little about such popular trumpery of details of *mise-en-scène* to catch the eye and ear and pique imagination. For that reason, perhaps, this throbbing transcript of modern society has not struck the fancy of professional managers. Indeed, there is but slight theatrical craft in the work in the common acceptance of the term. For all my admiration of Echegaray—and no modern play has impressed me so profoundly as the one under

notice—I should not venture to pretend for his work that dexterity of construction, refinement of joinery, lightness of touch or grace of adornment that characterize the French school and the best products of the English, as shown by Pinero. "Galeoto" is a mighty play because of its cordial truth, unswerving logic, the sweep of fate, direct and irresistible as in Æschylus or Sophocles, and because of the haunting lesson it sends straight home to men's bosoms. Borne onward by his motive, the dramatist carries his story in undiverging line to the bitter end, disdaining to pause or step aside for the sake of the trivial elaborations that ordinarily make for stage effect upon the injudicious.

At the very rise of the curtain the *deus-ex-machina* stalks into view, with none of the "preparation" that the vulgar horde of criticism insists to be essential. *Don Julian* and his wife have just returned from the opera, where their appearance without young *Ernesto*, their friend and ward, started a buzz:

"What has happened that Ernesto, the inevitable Ernesto, is not in his usual place at Cristina's side?"

Plainly the town has made up its mind about *Ernesto* and *Cristina*. And about the husband too—poor fool! None of the three has the remotest suspicion of the significance of these comments—not even *Don Julian*, a man of affairs and of worldly experience. So *Don Severo*, the husband's brother, feels bound, for the sake of the family honor, to enlighten him on the subject. And his wife, *Mercedes*, likewise imparts the town's gossip to *Cristina*.

"Why, everybody's laughing at your husband now," she says.

"What! Laughing at Don Julian? Well, I pity the man he catches at it," *Cristina* retorts in tones that show her value of her husband.

Don Julian angrily resents his brother's warnings and counsel. He will hear no word of the gossip that touches his honor or his wife's or the loyalty of *Ernesto*, to whom he has taken the place of a father. But turning, he sees them in gay, happy, sympathetic, converse. They are both young—much younger than he—and *Ernesto* is a poet, a dreamer, fashioned for the love of women. *Julian* gazes at them pensively, as if suddenly anxious.

"Well," *Severo* asks, "are you beginning to see at last?"

"Away with you!" the husband answers, as if awakened. "Your evil thoughts begin to infect even me. I'll have no more of it."

But the poison is in his veins. "Galeoto" has begun his work, just as in the story of Francesca and Paolo.

Still resisting the subtle venom, *Julian* opposes *Ernesto's* resolve to leave the shelter of his roof and to take up his life in a distant land.

"Let him go," *Severo* urges, with much good sense, it will be admitted. "Once he is away from here this scandal will end."

"No, I will make no compromise with wrong," *Julian* answers. "Ernesto is a loyal friend, Cristina is an honest wife. But even now she grieves over his

unhappiness. You have all dinned into their ears that they love each other—and perhaps they have come to believe it. Shall I send him into exile, a martyr for my wife to worship in secret?"

Then the quarrel in the town's favorite rendezvous of gossip, between *Ernesto* and *Nebreda*, and the challenge to the death. *Julian*, learning of the affair, hastens with *Severo* to *Nebreda's* house and demands an instant encounter.

Cristina, panic-stricken by the scandal that involves her husband's honor, comes to *Ernestos'* lodgings to forbid him to fight for her.

"That is my husband's privilege," she says proudly, "and his alone. No man but he shall guard my good name."

"Do you, then, despise me?" *Ernesto* asks.

"Ah, my dear, sweet friend, I pray for you—and weep for you."

Veritably the poison has done its work.

"A woman may pray for anyone," *Ernesto* says, half to himself, "she weeps only for one."

Fate is at their heels now. There is the sound of approaching voices—*Severo's*, his son *Pepito's*, and others'. *Cristina*, dismayed and distracted, hides behind the curtain of *Ernesto's* couch. *Don Julian* is borne in, mortally wounded by the skillful *Nebreda*. They start to take him to the alcove.

"Not there; I forbid it!" *Ernesto* cries.

"Are you mad?" *Severo* protests. "See, Don Julian is dying."

They pull the curtain aside, and *Don Julian* stands face to face with the woman for whose fair fame he has given his life.

Galeoto's task is almost finished. To all the world *Ernesto* and *Cristina* are now guilty—to all the world but themselves. *Mercedes*, with the finer feminine instinct, faintly doubts that *Cristina* has sinned. And *Julian's* wife, to the very end, defends, still unwittingly of course, the spotless purity of her honor, even from the faintest sentiment of conscious disloyalty. Once she seems to *Mercedes* to betray herself. It is when she is told that *Ernesto* has met the scandal-mongering *Nebreda* and slain him with a single sword-thrust.

"I knew he would!" *Cristina* cries proudly.

"You say that as if—as if——"

"What! You mistrust me, too?"

"At least you will admit," *Mercedes* insists, "that Ernesto loves you."

"No, no, no—he does not love me—he never loved me. I swear it by my sainted mother. And I for him have never known one single, passing thought but that of simple friendship. In my heart there is not, there never has been, love for any man but Julian."

"Is that the truth?"

"I have never lied," *Cristina* answers. "It is the truth now; but God knows what you all may do with your unceasing suspicion—your gossip and scandal—weaving about us a mist of doubt and self-distrust through which we can no longer see our own souls

clearly. In the end you may distort the lie into truth."

"You see," *Mercedes* is quick to answer, "you are not certain of yourself."

"I'll prove that I am—tell him to leave here! He has done harm enough in this house. Tell him to go—I want never to see him again!"

"Tell him that with your own lips, if you don't love him," *Mercedes* retorts.

"That I will—and you shall see how I tell him."

But, alas! she weeps when she bids him leave her forever, and *Ernesto*, on his bended knees, begs forgiveness for all the trouble he has brought into her life.

"You shameless creatures!" *Severo* shouts, rushing upon them from the side of his dead brother. "Out of this house, both of you!"

"You hear, Cristina, they cast us out—together," *Ernesto* says. "Their judgment unites us. Come with me."

"Ah, now we have the truth!" *Severo* cries, in mingled triumph and bitterness.

"Yes, now it is as you would have it," *Ernesto* answers defiantly: "never until this moment was there thought of sin between us. This woman's soul was pure as the sunbeams—my heart as clear as the skies. Cristina loved none but Julian. I was his loyal friend, ready to serve him to the death. And that I would swear to the Great Judge before whom Julian has now gone to arraign her and me. So, too, it would

have been to the end. But now! Now we are as you would have us—laden with guilt, boldin shame. When the life-warmth fled from the body of the murdered Julian, it kindled in our hearts the flames of accursed passion. Go cry it from the windows and the house-tops—to all your neighbors, you and your kind: 'Yes, we were right—Cristina and Ernesto are lovers—they confess it, without blame or blush.' And when they ask you who has wrought this—this—marvel and infamy, you may answer them: 'You have done it—and I—and that man there—and that one—all of us—everywhere. We mixed the subtle poison and scattered it to the winds so that these two might breathe it in, to stifle conscience and stain the soul.' Yes, the triumph is yours—you've done your hellish work well. Come, Cristina, they have given you to me—my sacred love, my eternal life. Henceforth you rest in my arms—they've willed it so—and may all-righteous Heaven judge between them and us!"

And *Ernesto* puts his arm about her in token of mastery and protection.

"The Great Galeoto" has done his work.

Curiously enough, all the discord and strife of this intensely human composition is dispelled by that last triumphant note of defiance to the world and the ways of the world. With its courage, its confidence, its consciousness of helpless right, it rings resounding and commanding above all meaner tones. It thrills and exalts, for all its somberness, like the Trauermarsch of the Stainless Knight.

The Moral of Moonshine

The Moral of Moonshine

STRAIGHT out of the moon Queen Mab must have galloped to bring to the author of "John-a-Dreams" the conceits from which he fancied the play. Athwart his nose, in the fashion phrased by Romeo's cousin, the fairy must have driven with even more than wonted recklessness her chariot of cobwebs and moonbeams. For, verily, the play is such stuff as dreams are made of—day-dreams, at any rate—and through its scenes and lines the moonshine floweth like a stream.

Twin lovers of the lotus—cocotte and opium-eater!—Mr. Chambers cleanses of their sins and cures of their habits in the cerulean mists that pervade his drama. Against the reason, if not the rhyme, of chill, prosaic experience, he unites the apostates from perversity and sends them back, on the yacht *Moonbeam*, to the Ægean isle where their hands first touched and their eyes first met in the flash of passion.

A trull for a heroine, an opium victim for a hero—could stage-extravagance go further? And yet a cry of disappointment went up in certain quarters that the author of "John-a-Dreams" had fallen short of some of his contemporaries in daring! It would seem, though, too much to demand from the creator of *Kate Cloud* and *Harold Wynn* that he keep them faithful to

Paphos and poppy to the end of the story. It is enough of surprise and sensation that he contrives to win them from their infatuations and join them in matrimony with fair promise of happiness. He could not have done so much but for the fairy that spins dreams.

Beyond question, a fallen woman—as *John-a-Dreams'* love describes herself—may be lifted from shame. And a man may be freed from the habit of opiates. But only Queen Mab herself could prompt a dramatist to send such a pair to the altar, even after their reformation was as assured as any earthly thing can be. They may, indeed, live a very merry life for a season—full of novelty and entertainment—they will have so much to tell each other! But unless the laws of heredity are quite invalid, the offspring of such an enterprising couple present probabilities not pleasant to contemplate. However, it is only a fairy story that Mr. Chambers tells us, and perhaps, like Attila, they will drink so much hydromel down there in the Ægean isle that we need not worry about their posterity.

If we were only convinced that everything would go well with *Harold* and *Kate* themselves, we should be as nearly satisfied as need be. But, for my own part, I left the theatre with serious misgivings, as I saw the *Moonbeam* carrying the twain away from sober Southampton, and back into the languorous airs of Southern seas. A yacht pinking the coast of Italy or Greece is a perilous abode for those still innocent. What must it be for the reformed?

I was haunted, too, by the memory of *Kate's* offer to be *Harold's* mistress, since she deemed herself unworthy to be his wife because of her past. 'Ah,' one said to one's self in annoyance, 'you will go back to it, will you? This time for love, to be sure, where before it was for gain; but it's the old life, for all that!' And there was the story, too, of her first step into shame. She herself described her progress into wantonness. She did not fall—she walked calmly and deliberately into sin. Hers was not the familiar story—"I was young and foolish; I loved a man—adored him—would have died for him; he proved a villian—betrayed me, abandoned me. I was disgraced—nowhere to go—what was left for me?" No—*Kate Cloud* chose the street because it seemed to her to offer the simplest means of a comfortable livelihood—just as it did to her mother before her, as she explains with a candor that, while perhaps beautiful in itself, is of no particular dramatic value. For, surely, it does not satisfy moral requirements nor the logic of facts in this instance. Mr. Chambers's heroine is obviously a woman of wit, talent and resources. It could not have been impossible or even very difficult for her to earn a living without sacrificing her virtue. So many honest paths of usefulness are open to women in these days. The stage certainly was always ready for one gifted with such a voice as *Kate Cloud* possesses when we meet her in the play. She need not have traversed the town to reach the theatre; and once there she would have been secure.

I have dwelt with some feeling upon this detail in the career of the chief figure in Mr. Chambers's play, because of its possible, and even probable, influence on her future, and because it reminds me vividly of an episode in actual life, of which I was an eyewitness. I recall a friend of my youth who made the same hazardous experiment as *John-a-Dreams*. He was a serious-minded fellow, and yet, like *Harold Wynn*, a dreamer: a writer of verses, a profound scholar and curiously enamored of the study of philosophy. Indeed, he had a perfect passion for philosophy; the zeal with which he undertook courses in the most obscure and abstruse phases of the subject made him remarked in a great university. He found much delight, too, in bringing his acquirements in this department of learning into play in the affairs of everyday life. So when chance brought him the acquaintance of a sweetly pretty girl, whose untrammeled mode of life had long been a care to the local constabulary and a shock to the entire university, he at once set out to lure the stray back to virtue along the path of pure reason. Epicurus, Plato, Kant, Schopenhauer, Epictetus, Zeno—he summoned them all to cheer and aid him in his good work. The interesting experiment was the wonder of all the college, and the ridicule of a considerable part of it, as well. But the young philosopher persisted in his noble ambition, often in the face of the most discouraging arguments advanced by his protégée. Like *Kate Cloud*, she came to abandon her riotous customs,

but like *Kate Cloud*, too, she eagerly offered herself as mistress to her protector. He, another *John-a-Dreams*, would be satisfied with nothing short of marriage; and in the end, as he was a young man of wealth and of brilliant prospects, he had his way.

That is the point where the story ends in Mr. Chambers's play. In the reality that we have been regarding, there the tragedy began. Phryne and the philosopher were very happy, to all outward appearance, for a year and a day; or, at any rate, the philosopher was. Phryne insisted that she liked the new order of things and that she was contented. But she generally sighed when she said 'contented.'

The end was almost too ugly to bear detailed recital. It is enough for our purpose to state that philosophy finally failed of domination. Phryne went back to the streets with the added *chic* of a sensational romance and a proud family name. The student of Zeno found rest in suicide. The fame of his experiment still abides in a great university.

It does not follow that *John-a-Dreams* will meet with such a fate. Indeed, he starts with a distinct advantage over his predecessor in the hazard of life with a woman who was wanton by heredity and breeding and who turned virtuous only when she left the town for the theatre.

It was to give *Harold Wynn* a better chance for success with *Kate Cloud*, I fancy, that the creator of the character made him a slave of the betel. A rake, a libertine, or even a drunkard, would not have

answered the dramatist's purpose of proportion and equality. He wanted a hero who should be approximately as hopeless as his heroine in the matter of antecedents. A rake, a libertine, a drunkard, a gambler—the mysterious morale of society deems none of these beyond rehabilitation. But the opium-fiend—there you have a companion-piece for Aspasia! The desperation of their pasts secures each from the reproach of the other, and their union is no unequal match either in their own eyes or in the eyes of the world.

Therein, as far as I can see, lies the moral of "John-a-Dreams," if a moral you must have.

Mr. Chambers possibly intended to prove that not even an oath of eternal fraternity—such as was the Oxford compact sworn between *Harold Wynn* and *Hubert Garlinge*—can stand against the accident of sexual passion. Beneath the title of his drama he writes: "When I wandered in the paths of love, when love clung to my garments, I lost my friend." And the action of the scene, all of its power and most of its sentiment, have their origin in the struggle between the two men who burn with desire for the reformed Cyprian. Of course one must lose in this battle of love, and he who fails the author paints a villain. Possibly he devised the moral to transpire from that.

Or possibly there is no moral in "John-a-Dreams"! It occurs to me that I may have been pursuing a will-o'-the-wisp in searching for a problem in this merely picturesque fantasy. As well, perhaps, grasp at the

substance of a moonbeam or look for the purse of gold at the end of a rainbow. It is moonshine—mere moonshine—the play never impressed me as anything else. And yet, feeling that in these tense and virtuous times even our lightest diversion must have a leaven of moral intent and spiritual purpose, I have sought to discover the lesson that Mr. Chambers set out to teach us in the wedlock of a trull and a morphio-maniac.

I fear, though, that if there be a moral in what we have been regarding, it lies not in the ponderous and ponderable elements of Mr. Chambers's drama; not in the problems of heredity or of sexual equality in sin or of the probable permanence of reformation. If there be any moral at all, it must be found in the moonshine of which the author's work chiefly consists.

There is a moral in moonshine, paradoxical as the phrase may seem: the moral of beauty, of charm, of the delights of imagination. There is no body, no virility to such a play as "John-a-Dreams." It is as "thin of substance as the air, and more inconstant than the wind." It is inevitable that one should tear its theme to shreds, deride its logic, chaff its extravagance, fleer at its fustian—in short, damn the play in easy terms—once one is out of the playhouse. But while there, under the influence of the moonshine with which the author and the actors and the stage mechanics—particularly the stage mechanics—beguile your senses, it is difficult, for me at least, to miss delight in such a work. One need not be completely sophisticated in the ways of the world to comprehend

the inordinate extravagance of Mr. Chambers's theme nor an expert in dramatic composition to discover the weaknesses in the author's craft. And yet the play has much of sensuous charm.

It may token imbecility, but I confess to a fancy for moonshine. To me it has always seemed the one splendid luxury that the poorest and meanest of mortals may have in common with the rich and the glorious. Crœsus sails in quest of it to the Mediterranean or the Adriatic, in a princely craft shining with satinwood and sandal and teak. Poet, painter, musician soar to empyreal realms for it. Lovers find it in each other's eyes. It happens now and then that you and I, who are neither Crœsus nor painter nor poet nor aught else that is blessed of the gods, chance upon this rare exotic on Broadway, around the corner from our lodgings, within the sound of cables and trolleys, within sight of hideous carbon lights, within touch of all that is ugly and discordant and stubbornly vulgar in the stolid, material, money-grubbing town. And the event is refreshing, exhilarating, enrapturing, like a walk through meadows wet with moon-haze.

With the morning comes calm reflection—and a rheumatism that your doctor tells you any blamed fool might have expected to follow idiotic loafing in damp grass. And then what only a few hours before seemed strangely sensuous, inspiring, ineffably delicious, looks in the prosaic glare of day simply silly and ridiculous and mawkish. So it is with such a play as "John-a-Dreams," once you are away from the magic of its cir-

cumstances—the music, the resounding speeches, the delusion of scenic distances, the myriad snares of stage-craft. Then, half ashamed of the ease with which your senses were trapped, your reason netted in a mesh of pretty nothings, you burst out—tommyrot!

In the final judgment, though, of such a work, it is but just to consider the locale, the atmosphere, and all the ambiency of the conceit. If it seems to you vastly extravagant, monstrous fantastic, rampantly sentimental, *überspannt*, as the German would term it, pray remember that it is on the yacht *Moonbeam* that the scene unfolds itself, in the Mediterranean, with purple Patmos silhouetted against the silvered horizon. What men and women say to one another under such conditions may easily sound artificial, unreasonable, to minds attuned to the conventions of Broadway, Harlem, Gondola Row and Columbus Avenue.

There is a Mediterranean, you know, and the moonlight there is something different from the moonlight on Gowanus Bay. And some yachts that skim the waters of that storied sea carry a quaint company in which there may really be cocottes and verse-makers and opium-fiends and libertines and flirting wives—just as we see on the *Moonbeam*. And the commonplace may come to have very little place in the lives of such sybarites and poets. To look upon slanting shallops, rocking caracks speeding by under sails of scarlet, mazarine and umber lighted by a dazzling moon; to catch from some floating palace the strains of 'cello, harp, and guitar; to have the senses softened by breezes sweet

as those that blow from Hymettus; to drink rare vintages from goblets against whose golden lining the saffron wine bubbles in globes of pearl—what mortals say and do under such influences may of course seem woefully unreal to perceptions keyed to Broadway. When next Mr. Chambers writes for New York he should keep this in mind.

The Reasonableness of Clorinda Wildairs

The Reasonableness of Clorinda Wildairs

IF "A Lady of Quality" were as poor a play as some proclaim, the task of the belated reviewer would be quite easy. And if it were as fine a play as the authors maintain, the task would be even easier. But half-truths are proverbially elusive.

The town took to *Clorinda Wildairs* in spite of her rapping oaths, her three lovers, and her disregard for the Decalogue. And in spite, too—wonder and prodigy!—of some stupid bungling on the part of the playwrights.

There is no getting around those "spites," and getting over them without a cropper seems well-nigh impossible. One might turn back and avoid the obstacles by referring the popular success of the adventure to the favor and fascination of the principal actress. That were the readiest course. In the soft light of the sympathy and grace that inform such a player, it may be difficult, at times, to discern the exact value of the personal quality. Just as in a perfect melody it were difficult to differentiate the precise virtues of harp, viol and 'cello in the complete charm. So, I repeat, one might refer, with self-conviction, the favor of

Clorinda Wildairs to the command and insinuation of the impersonator. And that I believe was the dominant note in the immediate opinion of the enterprise.

If I refrain from rushing to join the chorus it is because I recall that the *Clorinda* that rowdied, swaggered and moved majestic, in turn, through Mrs. Burnett's pages caught and held my sympathies, just as the *Clorinda* that treads the boards seized the fancy of the town. She was a bad lot in the beginning, I know, and her sins left their mark, for all her own fine deeds and Mrs. Burnett's fine words: but men have died and men will live for many worse than she, and pursue, adore and reverence them. That is why the author's creation survives and prospers in the face of all the protests against her possibility, her probability. In Miss —— the character found satisfying incarnation, spiritually and visually, and I yield to no one in sensibility to her aptitude and presence; but I deny that any skill or temperament could win affection and interest for such a preposterous and outrageous creature as *Clorinda's* critics seem to believe her.

The story rings true. The tone is unusual, outlandish, savage, and it strikes the ear with shocking unfamiliarity—like the music of strange islands that corals build or submarine volcanoes upheave. But there is no discord with reason or logic or life. What we take for such has its show of being in our own blunt senses. The stage harps on one tune, strikes conventional chords, strums certain strings, so that a sudden, audacious variance hurts by the surprise. If it is without

our intimate ken we denounce it "improbable," "impossible."

So far from being that, Mrs. Burnett's heroine, in book and in scene, is the very reverse; she is real and actual. And in her time, period and circumstances she is even matter-of-course. It is no strain to fancy *Clorinda Wildairs* in the England of two centuries ago. Indeed, if one were to tell me that her like might be found here in this region of Tammany politics—and now in these days of commonplace—I should not be incredulous.

What, after all, are the elements of "impossibility" and "improbability" in the creature of Mrs. Burnett's fiction? In childhood she frolics with stable boys, rides their charges helter-skelter and answers them with their own oaths. Well, who that has lived remote from cities has not known precocious pullets that did the same? Some, too, vastly better guarded than was poor Clo!

Later came a rake from London—and the madness of moonlight, and the rose garden. H'm! there have been rose gardens before *Clorinda's* time and since. The roses don't tell all they know. Dear, kind roses! No wonder poets and lovers cherish them.

And then *Clorinda* weds a man no longer young, but rich, noble and powerful to protect her. She does not love him, but that, too, has been the case before her day and since. Faithful she is, though, and honest. Who will dare assert that to be "impossible" or "improbable"!

The *Earl of Dunstanwolde* goes the way of age, and *Clorinda*, free in all her glorious spirit and beauty, turns with what is best in her love to *Osmonde*, the ideal of her fancy, the idol of her heart. She is not the first woman who has had to wait for happiness.

The killing of *Oxon!* A mere accident. A blow of the hand, touching that one fatal point on the temple, might have done the deed as easily as the heavy riding-whip. A startling, ugly episode, if you will, but still not "impossible" or "improbable."

And now someone confronts me with the uncanny burden that *Clorinda* dragged in the night to the vaults beneath. "Impossible!" "Improbable!" again the scoffers cry. But look to your cellars, messieurs—look to your cellars; particularly if they be walled up.

Strange, fantastic, extravagant all this; but not impossible and not improbable. Women have done all these things, and women may do them again. And men will love them none the less—and even more, perhaps. Only the roses must not tell.

To keep their secret from *Osmonde* needed greater courage in Mrs. Burnett than in her heroine—courage to flout the traditions and superstitions of the theatre. The suppression is daring and beautiful—beautiful in art, in morals and in common sense. And so true to life!

Mrs. Burnett's critics are especially severe on this point. They will never forgive her for not telling *Osmonde* about that night in the rose garden.

Osmonde would never forgive her if she did tell. That is the way of men, and the author, wise in human nature and skilled in her craft, has bravely preferred the peace of the hero.

Indeed, for the contentment of her critics or the gratification of the general public, Mrs. Burnett makes small sacrifice at any point, save in the last scene in the last act. There she forsakes her convictions and gives over to the crowd as meekly as any of the most popular stage-mechanics of the day. And with results that nearly undo all the excellences of her preceding audacity. When I think of the mawkish moments at *Sister Ann's* deathbed I am ready to raise my voice with the Philistines. Only, then I recall the glories of the second act of Mrs. Burnett's play. The splendid, animated, colorful picture that Botticelli might have painted rises before me. I see again the great-souled, goddess-like *Clorinda* crown herself with chaplet of those silent roses. I hear the brave imperial speech with which she hurls her betrayer into rout and confusion. For an instant I remain stunned by the daring and majesty and truth of the device, and then I want to hail the work as perfect as the creator seems to imagine it. But, alas! there is that stupid, puerile treatment of the crucial scene of the play to rebuke enthusiasm. With words of irritating needlessness Mrs. Burnett robs the killing of *Oxon* of most of its dramatic potentiality. Given an actress of shabby personality, and I dread to think what might happen at this point.

Indeed, the play is full of perilous possibilities. Time and again it might easily fall into ridiculous ruin. The mere playwright, had he the wit, originality and fearlessness to hazard the material of "A Lady of Quality," would have precipitated catastrophe inevitably. It needed something finer than deftness in construction or acquaintance with theatric conventions to steer safely through the Scylla and Charybdis that stretch along the progress of the romance. The nicest taste, the keenest discrimination and, above all, skill in words were demanded by the occasion. Without them *Clorinda* should have our sneers and snickers instead of our sympathies. In her case speech is golden, casting the halo of poesy and romance over what else were grotesque and violent. If I wanted corroboration of the theory that the literary quality is the first and essential virtue of a drama, the rescue of *Clorinda* would convince me. It is the literary quality that saves "A Lady of Quality."

The Superstition of Brunettes in the Theatre

The Superstition of Brunettes in the Theatre

EVE—she of the garden watered by Hiddekel—was a brunette. I have that from a public story-teller at Shiraz, who had it in turn from his grandfather, one of the watchers by Háfiziya. He, again, had it from a priest of the cloud-wrapped temple of Hukairya, where stone tablets give to the Creator's first serious work all the traditional machinery of disturbance: "Eyes lustrous as the black agate of Athura, hair hued and clustering like Persian grapes, the dusky pink of the pomegranate in the cheek, lips a thread of scarlet through a woof of russet, form fairer and sweeter than the virgin rose." They knew a brunette in those days.

The record is interesting chiefly as indicating primeval agreement with modern significance of complexion. Eastern sagacity attributed to the brunette the same prowess of mischief with which it is associated in Western sentiment. Blue eyes, golden curls, peachy tints were not the forces to precipitate the catastrophe of Eden, in the fancy of the ancients. It needed the features that, to the general, symbol passion, soulfulness, intensity, recklessness and—yes,

wickedness. For all those qualities mistaken instinct assigns to charms in dusk; beauty in livelier lights is held lackadaisical.

The fallacy has abided through all time. More, it has strengthened with age, until to-day the brunette is deemed the incarnation of all graces that we clumsily comprehend in temperament, while femininity blonde passes for a plaything, a light-o'-life, incapable of emotion, acute feeling or any sentiment save the most superficial. Common speech names her prosaic, matter-of-fact, cold; while her nut-brown sister suggests at a glance romance, phantasy, vagary and veins afire. The women of the South one imagines of the same temper as the sun that stains them. The snows and ice of the North represent in popular notion the women of that region. Mention of Naples conjures a creature of raven hair, eyes of jet, and love fierce, jealous and unchanging: the blood-red rose. Stockholm starts a picture of beauty pink and white, shallow as a water-color, chill, lazy, phlegmatic, stupid even: the languorous, logy lily. The German blonde is the type of *Hausfrau*, the Gallic brunette the ideal of sentimental encounter and tragic adventure. The one a combination of homely, comfortable, quite earthly and spiritually petty virtues; the other a dazzling, seductive array of potent and possibly destructive attributes that make for heartaches and dreams.

All this, of course, only in the popular imagination. In reality and actuality the truth is different, if not reverse. But though you opposed to the delusion an

infinity of instances and authorities of experience, yet would the ancient prejudices remain. For some reason beyond reach, men have concluded that great souls peer out from ebon eyes shadowed by a wealth of dark lashes; that when Nature fashions in careless, indifferent mood, she tints the windows of the mind with color of the sky or sea and weaves the hair of sunbeams.

Poets and painters have done their share, and more, for the perpetuation of the curious conceit. Historians even are not wholly without blame; for, influenced by their own subservience to the general idea on the subject, they have frequently darkened a lady's hue to conform to the complexion of her morals and manners. Some have even gone so far as to put beneath Cleopatra's satin skin the pigment of the Ethiop, and recent commentators have found a new reading of the Queen of Sheba's color-scheme in her kingly descendants of Abyssinia. Boadicea, too, for all the unmixed Anglicism that gave her tribe the aspect of angels, is represented in the pages of Tacitus —who, of course, never saw her—as a swart amazon whose coal-black tresses vied in gleaming with her bronze helmet. Tacitus probably could not conceive a blonde endowed with the courage, wit and ferocity that compassed the suprise of Verulamium and the massacre of seventy thousand Romans. The blonde, as he knew her, was a dame of other occuption and inclination: the pleasure-loving Cytherean whom the art of the period represented in Carrara, pinked and

gilded in the fashion that modern priestesses imitate with rouge and peroxide.

In the domain of poesy and palette the seemingly innate superstition regarding the emotional, temperamental and intellectual superiority of the dark-skinned woman is made obvious in instances confusingly numerous. In lyrics, in story, in drama above all, the familiar and admired figure feminine is in almost every instance she whose cheeks tell of the south wind's kisses, whose eyes reflect the midnight. A string of fictional heroines, from Lilith to Lalage, from Juliet to the Maid of Athens, would stretch like a necklace of black pearls, with here and there, perhaps, a lily-maid of Astalot shining out in exquisite contrast.

Painters confessedly prefer the brunette model; few venture the pigmentary expression of the profounder emotions save through the medium of dark-eyed and dark-haired women. The Madonna—at once the aspiration, despair and hope of the craft—very, very rarely appears save in the dusky features of her race. In a little-frequented corridor in the Vatican, leading, if I remember rightly, from the belvedere, there hangs a canvas by Sassoferrato that has always seemed to me to breathe the divinity of the Madonna beyond any of the more-famed presentments. The eyes glow with a supernal light that thrills and awes as might a glance from Deity. In all the features there is a mystic unearthliness that prompts one to hasten the final, satisfying look, lest the picture pass from view like a glorified dream. Pagan as I am, that semblance of the

Madonna would almost persuade to belief; the memory of the vision has abided with me for many years.

And yet I have never been able to find, in criticism, or guidebook or traveler's lore, assuring justification of my own impression of this particular Salvi. And this to a great extent, I believe, because the Madonna in the canvas is blonde; with eyes bluer than the skies of the painter's own Ancona and locks of the saffron of dawn. Had Sassoferrato worked such marvels of tone and expression in dark colors his Madonna would probably surpass Raphael's in common reverence. As it is, the sightseer slights it with perfunctory notice and marvels, perhaps, that a painter should have sought to write the Divine Story in the face of a blonde.

Nowhere, though, does the popular fallacy in this matter of complexional symbolism exert itself so conspicuously as in the public amusement halls. There, in all serious endeavor, the brunette stands not only peerless but alone. For the trivialities of comedy and farce the blonde answers well enough, but it is doubtful whether she could serve satisfactorily as the protagonist of heroic or tragic or even seriously sentimental emotions; so stubborn is the prejudice that likens her psychic qualities to her coloring. The play-queens with whom we to-day have had acquaintance may boast the inky brows and black silk hair and bugle eyeballs that Shakespeare found to entangle all his senses. From Mrs. Siddons to Duse, through all the

intermediate and lesser lights from Ristori to Berndardt and Janauschek and Marlowe and the score of leading-ladies of immediate vogue and critical esteem, the sallow hue has been the first essential of scenic command. Had chance made them otherwise only in the slight detail of complexion, leaving them unchanged in every other quality, it is approximately certain that their progress to theatric pre-eminence would have been vastly more difficult.

The exceedingly rare actress who has compelled the popular consideration in other than comic or lackadaisical rôles has prevailed against tremendous obstacles. Miss Rehan has been deterred from certain tragic heroines of her aspiration by regard for this general skepticism; Miss Terry's *Lady Macbeth* has never been rated at its true worth because of it. Lillian Russell's *La Cigale* was a performance informed with poesy and cordial grace, but it had been folly to try to convince the public of the real virtue of the achievement. It is a terrible thing for an actress to be as blonde as Miss Russell. (I have often wondered that her ambitions did not suggest the possibilities of walnut stain.) To achieve any but the most evanescent rank, to make the star of one's talents shine out above the "blush of morning and the milky way" style of beauty, bespeaks wondrous gifts.

A Calvé, on the other hand, has only to leer at the multitude out of the corner of her bugle eyeball to be instantly proclaimed an epochal artist. What temperament! the crowd cries. The sweep of velvet

lashes hardly masks the fervid love-lights. Passion riots in the hang of her hazy lip. Her cheek reflects the somber mantle of the tragic Muse. In her black hair are meshed the devices of the Furies. And when she flirts her hips at the receptive throng—who dares deny the verity of her art?

Nor is it only a Calvé, with the lusty feats of her *Carmen*, that lays hold of imagination and routs criticism. Instances plenty start to prove the peculiar and hypnotic authority that a woman may wield if only she be dark enough. Many a worthy soubrette, pleasing in farce and operetta, has been seduced into ruinous flights by mistaken insistence on the significance of her duskiness. I will name no names—but the list of stars gone astray into oblivion would be shorter were it not for the prevalent delusion that mistakes lethargy for languor and biliousness for temperament. Happy the creature hepatic! With the multitude she passes for poetic. Her megrims are melancholy, her sallowness saturninity, and her tantrums temperament.

Nature is revenging herself for this absurd and persistent partiality that gives to the brunette all the best prizes of life. The blonde is disappearing, obsolescing. Society is paying the penalty of unnatural selection. Science discovers, to its surprise, that Darwin's theory works both ways. Statistics that may not be refuted attest the growing infrequency of sapphire eyes and locks of topaz. A few brave souls, choosing to be good rather than great, may combat with the re-

sources of chemistry. But what can the rouge pot and the flask of peroxide avail against the will of Nature?

Equally futile is it for man to retrace the blind way he has gone in this matter. Too late now to recall that, despite the dictates of legend and poetry and prevalent opinion, the romances of real life, of actual experience, play about the pulchritude of pink. He whose sweetest memory does not cluster about the lily-white maid whose gentle beauty did match the apple blossom at her throat, has not wholly lived. If, tricked by the superstition that enwraps the brunette, he has sought frank affection, loyalty, ardor and scenes only in eyes of midnight, he has missed the very grace of existence. It may be true—as tradition and precept seem to predicate—that for the purposes of art the brunette is supreme, but 'tis my belief that when Nature fashioned the blonde it was with a finer sense of the ultimate object in view. And though men may incline to live and fret for the one, they will more likely die for the other.

Signora's Art and Madame's Antics

Signora's Art and Madame's Antics

THE mantle of no past-mistress of the scenic art has fallen upon the shoulders of Eleonora Duse. For her the Muses fashioned a virgin vestment, of texture more delicate, of grace more exquisite, in fancy richer, than any that ever yet adorned a woman of the stage. While Bernhardt but renews the traditions of Rachel —adding, perhaps, a refinement of method and illuminating them with an intelligence more subtle, a temperament more sensitive than those of her predecessor —Eleonora Duse discovers to us that rarest quality of genius, the genius of surprise.

In agreement with common opinion, I hold comparison hateful; it is generally either the clumsy device of the dusty pedant or the feeble affectation of the prig. That it has, however, just place in the present instance must appear to everyone who has knowledge of the regnant standards of dramatic achievement. The excessive patriotism or perversion of taste that submits the Italian artist to comparison with certain stagers of native development may be dismissed without consideration; for it is not dogmatic to assert that Bernhardt alone is worthy of contrast.

There is an interest half melancholy in the circumstance that the French actress must suffer in this

collation of mimic graces. One gives over the confidence in the perfection of Sara's gifts and methods reluctantly and sadly, as the youth surrenders the illusion of his first passion.

Some, dreading the conviction of their idol's subordination, would deceive themselves and us that this new deity is of another cult: they seek consolation in the pretension that Bernhardt and Duse are of different schools, and that whatever superiority contemporary criticism may adjudge the Italian springs rather from the method of art of which she is the exponent, than from any finer quality in the artist herself.

The subterfuge is pathetic, but paltry. It is an oft-used shift of inferiority to evade the truth and penalty of surpassed excellence. One may question, indeed, whether, in the nice discrimination of the day in all that pertains to theatric art, there could exist schemes and systems of dramatic impersonation distinctly varied and yet deserving of equal regard.

Granting even the possibility of this indecisive criticism, the truth remains that the twain of comediennes in reference tread in identically the same path of mimetic method; they both strive along the same course for the same goal. But the race has gone to the Italian; she outstrips her Gallic rival with such facility and felicity that amazement invents fanciful conditions to account for the startling defeat.

Until the advent of Duse, Bernhardt had been hailed by common acclaim as the arch-priestess of that academy of acting that holds for its principle and practice

the utter eradication of the player's personal identity, and the assumption in its stead that of the character impersonated.

The successful accomplishment of this purpose demands, of course, the tensest exercise of imagination, displaying itself not only in the abstract conception of the rôle, but in its adornment and enrichment with an infinitude of detail and suggestion, forming in the entirety an entity of realism—actuality.

It must in fairness be admitted that hitherto Bernhardt was deemed to have attained the utmost limit of the possibilities of this distinctly modern school of dramatic artifice.

We had not supposed that ingenuity of intelligence or faculty of dramatic invention could go beyond the "business" with which Bernhardt indicated the phthisical ailment of *Camille*. To touch the lips, in constant question, with a limp kerchief, positively took on the dignity of a classic in the traditions of the stage. The hectic flush of Clara Morris, the hacking cough of Modjeska, at once discovered their meanness in the presence of the cambric contrivance of the French actress. With that square of flaxen fabric Bernhardt was deemed to have floated into the empyrean of histrionic perfection and, thenceforth, every *Camille* was measured by the comparative skill with which she employed the pregnant handkerchief. Her rank in the dominant school of realism was determined very largely by the degree of frequency and alarm with which she touched the linen to her ashen lips.

Because the Italian actress, with an artistic sense vastly beyond that of the Frenchwoman, with a cunning infinitely finer, with an elaboration of method grander, a faculty of expression endlessly more varied than Bernhardt's, contrives to token the wasting ailment of *Camille* without resort to the vulgar mechanism in allusion, we are told, with something of an air, that she is of another school.

With every fresh example of Duse's capabilities and manner, it becomes more evident that the reason of the amazing difference in the performance of the two women must be sought elsewhere than in any fancied variance in their schemes and modes of dramatic portrayal: it lies in the players themselves. Temper, not training; inspiration, not method; soul, not system, have prevailed to advance the Italian to heights not dreamed of in the art philosphy of the other.

In the light of Duse's lustrous, vivid revelations, the exposition of the comparative inconsiderableness of Bernhardt's factitious faculties is little short of astounding. One knew, of course, that there are degrees of genius, just as there are of talent; but only the rarest imagination could have conceived the possibility of such transcendence as has fallen to this unique creature.

It is no reproach to our delicacy of perception or cultivation of taste that we mistook Bernhardt's "antics and wild imagery" for the outer show of consummate artistry. Duse had not yet displayed to our dazzled senses the celestial glories of her pure imagination. Every genius, as Carlyle has observed, is an

impossibility till he appear; and fancy is no more to be blamed for its failure to conceive the qualities of Duse, than for its inability to evolve the full delight of immortality.

Bernhardt did, indeed, attain the approximate perfection possible to any talent not born of mere inspiration. In anger, she was the hissing serpent whose glance is stunning and whose touch is death. In hate, she was the snarling tigress, the incarnation of rampant ferocity. In love—the love of which she could know—Bernhardt brought into play the tireless lust, the seductive languor, the entrancing enervation of her Oriental blood, and added thereto all the wiles and witchcraft of the practiced courtesan.

Is it a marvel that such antics of human passion filled us with wonder and charm?

And yet in contrast with the prodigies of Duse, these are but of the earth, earthy. Some—sensate, perhaps, only to garish effects—confess to miss in the work of the Italian the glow and luxuriance of tint that Bernhardt imparts to her flashy impersonations. There is, I admit, a certain quality of tropic and exotic color in the products of the Frenchwoman's cleverness that is happily wanting in the visible display of Duse's genius. But he who would prefer these meretricious smudges to the pervasive, tender glow that envelops the creations of the Italian with an atmosphere as blending and gently radiant as that of her own native land, would choose the harsh reds, the crying blue, the tinsel gilt of the Moorish mosque

before that mirrored magic of Aurora in the palace of the Rospigliosi wherein Guido Reni has imprisoned the pink and saffron of the nascent dawn, the pudic tints and hues of virgin nature.

In the display of the deeper emotions, the stronger passions, Duse surpassed the Parisian no less utterly than in the expression of the softer, sweeter sentiments of humanity. In Bernhardt's wrathful anger there is always the suggestion of the termagant; Duse seems the enraged Juno. Bernhardt's jealously always hints of the slighted wanton; Duse's of offended womanhood. Bernhardt piqued is a snappish shrew; Duse a proud spirit tortured. Bernhardt counterfeits grief admirably; Duse is grief itself.

And yet, I repeat, the methods employed by the two actresses are identical in kind; their difference is only in degree. In the instance of Bernhardt the infinity of niceties and devices, ingenious, elaborate though they be and at times even exquisite, are ever and obviously tricks and counterfeits. Duse imparts to these same passes of mimicry a mystic, elusive quality that merges them into reality beyond suspicion.

In truth, the Italian conceals her art so completely and securely that one is tempted often to doubt whether it is by art that she accomplishes her magic of dramatic deception. One recalls Monsieur Taine's comment on the genius of Shakespeare—a genius, in his opinion, independent of circumstance, unconscious of environment, or law, or rule; evolving its marvels from pure imagination.

It is in this latter attribute—the essential characteristic of distinctive difference between Duse and the Frenchwoman—that one may find the cause of the vast abyss that separates their scenic effectiveness. I would not deny Bernhardt the possession of imagination; but it is of that faulty order that only by training and forceful exercise can be made to take on the burden of creation. It is such imagination as enabled Mr. Longfellow to become a poet, or Mr. Whistler a painter, or Mr. Trollope a novelist. It is such imagination that a personality egoistic and material as is Bernhardt's, dominates it always, retaining for its possessor the self-consciousness, the mental complacence, the composure of soul that betray themselves despite effort of will and trick of art.

It is not such stuff as the celestial purity of fancy that transports Duse into realms that only demi-gods may hope to reach.

The very perfection of Duse's art baffles criticism and analysis. Its method and mechanics are so completely hidden from view that it is not given to mortal eyes to descry their manner or discover their movement. One reads Shakespeare without a thought of the form in which his incomparable conceptions are molded; one views Duse's impersonations with mind wholly wrapt and absorbed in their enthralling fidelity to truth, their awful majesty of beauty.

To seek to analyze the essence of the matchless grace that never for an instant fails of its sublimity, were as idle as to pluck the secret of its hue from the

petal of the rose, or clear the mystery of the moonlight's charm, or dissolve the elements of some harmony divine.

It is greatly to be regretted that the managers of Signora Duse and of Madame Bernhardt, respectively, did not so arrange their ventures that these celebrated actresses were offered for the simultaneous comparison of American critics and playgoers. It would have been in the nature of a liberal education in the craft of acting, and the result would have been vastly advantageous to the culture and discrimination of the public in the matter of the mimetic calling. There is no denying that there still lags in certain quarters an opinion, or a prejudice, or a notion, or whatever you will, that the Frenchwoman surpasses the Italian in expertness, effectiveness and popular fascination. It is high time that this fallacy was dispelled, but it will likewise require considerable time, and some such education as would have resulted from the opportunity of a simultaneous comparison of the two, to bring about this wholesome event. Bernhardt has the advantage of Duse by many years—very many, indeed, as matters go in art. By virtue of her superiority in this matter alone, Bernhardt has attained a fame more firmly established with the general and of far greater range in point of geography. She has been exploited, too, with vastly greater ingenuity than has Duse—with much greater cunning in advertising, and with a certain superb contempt for personal dignity. Her agencies of exploitation, comprising almost all the

factors in the machinery of the modern theatre from stage-hands to critics, have used a diversity of methods, including a large number of savage members of the animal kingdom, with the result, as I have already intimated, that Bernhardt's name is familiar to thousands where Duse's is only famous. But the infinite surpassing of the latter actress in all that is best in the essence of playing, if not in all that is efficacious in the artifice, discovered itself several years ago to the nicest tastes and the less impassioned judgments. And in making this seemingly dogmatic assertion, the writer is prompted in not the slightest degree by a consideration of the inevitable going-off in the matter of physical charms in Madame Bernhardt. The insistence with which several critics of ordinarily excellent discrimination and politeness dwell upon the effects wrought by the passing of Madame's grace of figure and refinement of feature is not only brutally ungallant, but wholly beside the question. Such commentaries are out of place, not only because of their execrable impertinence, but because they have no weight at all in determining the rarer and more essential elements in the respective attributes and attainments of two players, one of whom is the greatest of modern times and the other of whom is regarded as the greatest by considerable persons. It was for the persuasion to the truth of such of these latter as live here in this land where the art of theatre is as yet only in the bud, that arrangements should have been made whereby opportunity would be at hand for a comparative study of the

methods and effects of the two women. It is not good that anything resembling a doubt in the matter should endure one day longer than is absolutely necessary. All men and women who frequent the theatre, whether it be for amusement or for the education of the æsthetic faculties of the intellect, should be brought to see how and wherein Duse outshines Bernhardt as the evening star outshines the lime-light. Of course, in the end the truth must out: Bernhardt will take her place in the annals of the theatre on the level of inferiority where she properly belongs as compared with the Italian genius. But the complete correction of the popular fancy—or, perhaps, superstition—in the matter would have been measurably advanced by such a tilt as has hitherto been evaded.

When Mr. Irving Fails

When Mr. Irving Fails

IT is the fashion, or rather it is the cant, to patter of Mr. Irving as a stage-manager. Even his admirers have fallen into the vein of calling him a clever showman. They say he captures the imagination of his audience by his cunning in the material mechanism of the stage: that he has mastered the possibilities of the carpenter's contrivances and the scene-shifter's makeshifts; that he has grasped the secrets of lights and shadows; that he has fathomed the possibilities of gas-jets and electric-globes; that he has discovered the magic of colored slides; that he has taken the tricks of accompanying music, the powers of symmetric grouping, the capabilities from a scenic point of view of contrasts in costume and drapery. And that, therefore, he owes his vogue in all the English-speaking capitals of the world, his command over criticism as well as over the senses of his audiences, not to the subtle, the rarer and more refined qualities of mimicry, but rather to such vulgar details as I have catalogued.

There is nothing so stubborn as a prejudice of this sort. The crowd grabs it greedily and clings to it desperately, as if in excuse of their subservience to the charm of an Irving performance. Now, the latent

truth about the matter is that many of the most serious and delicious effects wrought by Mr. Irving and his companion-player are amid circumstances of comparatively commonplace *mise-en-scène*, stage-settings by no means out of the ordinary in painting, in lighting, or in appointments. One of the most peculiar and permanent impressions remaining from a consideration of the actor's repertoire is that left by his performance of *Mephistopheles*, an impression that haunts one for days and nights and gives to one an appreciation of the cunning and cruelty of his Satanic Majesty, and of the heaven-given frailty of humanity as well, that is apt to abide with one for a lifetime. And yet the production of "Faust" as we saw it in this country was but so-so. The panoramic display of *Faust's* dream, as I remember it, was distinctly gaudy and tawdry. I have seen the tragedy of Marlowe—or Goethe, as you will—produced much more picturesquely and splendidly in an American theatre of no importance; but surely none of us ever saw so attractive a devil as Mr. Irving portrays. A devil at once cognizant of his own mischief and so appreciative of the mischievous inclinations of his victims. Why, there is one single instant in that marvelous performance by Mr. Irving that attains a degree of perfection beyond which no actor need ever hope to go. It is that moment when *Satan*, having sent *Faust* on his errand of conquest, starts to enter the church whence *Marguerite* has come. Suddenly the chimes begin to ring. *Satan*, dumbfounded and disconcerted, agon-

ized by the hostile music, rushes about as if at a loss where to go to escape the clamor that tradition tells is so hateful to him. At last, with his fingers in his ears, he leans against the statue at the street corner, twisting and turning and writhing his body, distorting his features as if in a perfect torment of physical pain. And upon that pantomime the curtain falls—falls upon one of the rarest bits of acting in the entire range of the drama. Surely there are no marvels of stage mechanism, no ingenuity in scene-shifting, no tricks of light, no magic of music in the extraordinary effect that the actor accomplishes at this moment. It is the product of nothing but fine intelligence, of elaborate art and not of mere artifice.

In almost every one of Irving's performances there are to be met these memorable moments of absolutely perfect skill and of oddly refined intelligence that lift the man's gifts into the very highest realm of intellectual endeavor. Such a moment is that when, in "Shylock," he departs majestically from the courtroom of his stubborn persecutor. Such a moment, too, is that when in "Don Quixote" he lifts his pike to begin the watch on his arms in the inn yard. They will tell you that some part, a considerable part, of the remarkably complete idea that Mr. Irving gives you of Cervantes' hero in the curt little sketch of the voluminous novel may be traced to the beauty of that moonlit scene and to the delicious Spanish waltz that one hears faintly throughout the performance. But all that is but of a piece with the vulgar cant that has long been

prevalent regarding Mr. Irving and his craft. I am quite sure that that scene of which we have heard so much is not beyond the possibilities of any one of a dozen theatres within a sling's throw of Madison Square. But I doubt that there is another actor in the world who could portray as sweetly and as simply and grandly as Mr. Irving does the lovable weaknesses, the vanities and the pitiful insanities of the poor knight-errant.

Irving's masterpiece, in the opinion of the writer, is his *Benedick* in "Much Ado about Nothing," and a companion-piece in every way fit to share the laurels of the association is Miss Terry's *Beatrice.* The stage in no time and in no country has known finer acting than that put forth by these players in "Much Ado about Nothing." Shakespeare himself never conceived more splendid characterizations of the hero and heroine of his favorite comedy than that given to the world by Mr. Irving and Miss Terry. There is not one line, not one word in these rôles, that does not receive its full value. There is not an incident or an episode that fails to receive the nicest possible adjustment of light and shadow. The performance in its entirety is perhaps the most completely satisfying representation of a Shakespearian comedy that this century has known. In view, indeed, of the crudeness of stage appointments in Shakespeare's time and, more pertinently, in view of the fact that all the feminine rôles were impersonated by painted and simpering youths, it is perhaps not too much to say that even in Shakes-

peare's own theatre, where his own plays were produced under his own direction, the beauty, the wit and the tragedy of "Much Ado about Nothing" were never brought out in half the perfection that stamps the Irving production with the glory of faultless grace. And yet who would say that *mise-en-scène* was peculiarly splendid or prodigiously elaborate? In scarcely a single detail did Mr. Irving's production of "Much Ado about Nothing" transcend the usual: so it is worse than folly—it is stupid cant—to attribute any essential part of the delight that he gives his spectator in the rôle of *Benedick* to outer trappings and adornments. The charm comes from within—from the amazingly sensitive conception of the chief rôles of the comedy; from the complete comprehension of Shakespeare's intent, and from the truly magnificent intelligence of the readings.

It is a curious fact, and one that ought to silence this insistence upon the pre-eminent value of the more vulgar circumstance of an Irving performance, that the most delightful, the more memorable, the inspirational successes achieved by Mr. Irving and Miss Terry have been in conditions in which majesty of stage-mounting, splendor of appointments and scholarly correctness in multifarious details had no obvious part. There are perhaps no players in the world to-day who could impersonate the *Doctor Primrose* and the *Olivia* of Goldsmith's novel with anything like the abiding charm with which Mr. Irving and Miss Terry have presented these rôles. And yet here there

were no marvels of "production." Surely Mr. Irving's achievement in that trifle, "A Story of Waterloo," cannot be attributed to any prodigies in the craft of stage-mechanics. Nor were there any wonders of costume or scenery in the case of Miss Terry's performance in the paltry little affair arranged for the stage by Mrs. Craigie. One could cite half a score of instances of the same character and to the same purpose.

And now, on the other hand, mark you this equally curious fact: The most pronounced failures in which Mr. Irving and Miss Terry appeared in this country were amid the very scenic marvels to which the major part of their success is attributed by a considerable number of persons and of critics. In the matter of atmosphere and local color, in wealth of fabric, in correctness of detail, in the presentation of the modes and manners of a remote period, Mr. Irving's production of "Macbeth" has never been surpassed, and it probably never will be while the limitations of the theatre remain as they are to-day. The profoundest scholarship in England, the nicest taste, the most scrupulous research and a practically complete disregard of cost were occupied for months in the re-creation of a period of Scottish history distant by eight centuries or more. Shakespeare himself probably never dreamed such a representation of his tragedy.

Here we had that much talked of mechanical ingenuity of Irving brought to its highest developments and his skill as a "showman" given supremest display; and yet in no rôle in which Mr. Irving ever

appeared before us was he so unsatisfying, to speak euphemistically, or so absurd, to speak bluntly, as in this part in which several actors of vastly inferior gifts and attainments have given delight to the discriminating. A great part of this holds true, too, in the case of Miss Terry, whose *Lady Macbeth* left much to be desired. Other instances will occur to those familiar with the Irving-Terry repertoire in proof of the contention that the most serious, the rarest and most memorable failures of these players have evolved amid the very circumstances that have been deemed and declared prepotent adjuncts in their achievements.

The notorious mannerisms of Mr. Irving—and, in a lesser degree, of Miss Terry—not even their most partial admirers would venture to deny or defend. Rather, indeed, they would incline eagerly to admit their existence and acknowledge their possibilities of destructive effects: eagerly to admit their existence, I repeat, and the possibilities of their destructive effects, because all the more striking and convincing is the dominance of these players over such blemishes as a grotesqueness of gait, a vicious eccentricity of enunciation, and a peculiar violence against the general conventions of elocution. In the case of Mr. Irving, in particular, it is little short of wonderful that he should have been able to avail over mannerisms so obtrusive and so preposterous that were they not cast in the shade by the gorgeous splendor of his talents they would have damned him to the most terrible fate that can befall an actor. Nothing but the most brilliant

clarity of intellect, of heart and of soul could have blinded a generation of the most fastidious and sensate playgoers to a ruinous realization of his audacious peculiarities. It is all a superb exhibition of the subservience of the material, the merely physical, to the powers of mental refinement. A similar instance we have in our own theatre, where Mr. Mansfield stands supreme simply by reason of a mind that constantly reminds one of Mr. Irving's intellectual attributes. Almost identically as in the case of Mr. Irving, Mr. Mansfield has had to struggle against accidents of person, oddities of manner, an obtrusion of egoism, and seemingly ineradicable affectations that were robbed of their potency for ridicule only by the exercise of a poetic imagination, an intelligence brought to the last point of refinement, and a taste in which cognizance of the ugly is wanting.

Beerbohm Tree and Some Digressions

Beerbohm Tree and Some Digressions

ON several occasions after his return to England from a professional tour in this country, Beerbohm Tree complained in public interviews of the terms and tones in which the writer had discussed his work. Before his departure, too, he lost no opportunity to rail at an opinion of his scenic attainments that happened to differ from his own. And in a message addressed through the newspapers to "the dear American public," Mr. Tree must needs conclude his expressions of admiration and love with a reiteration that "with only one exception the criticism of our work was invariably just and kind."

To his intimation that the criticism under notice was not "kind," I offer no defense. I have always held that it is not the business of criticism to be "kind." To search for truth and to present it impartially, boldly—that is the occupation of criticism. Kindness, at the very most, is only its pre-occupation. Talent—honest, genuine talent—has no need of kindness, no use for it. For the enthusiastic celebration of fine achievements in art is in no way kindness. It may not even claim, properly, the merit of justice. It is simply an inevitable consequence. He who lauds a great poem or picture or mimic characterization obliges not

the performer. Rather is the eulogist beholden to him for the inspiration that moves his pen in graceful and perfervid measure.

Such being my notion regarding the virtue of charity in criticism, I cannot consistently advance any argument against Mr. Tree's charge of unkindness.

But it is a peculiar fact that English actors and English playwrights making the hazard of American favor and fortune apparently demand unqualified approval from American criticism and unremitting frequence from the public. And any failure on the part of critic or public is invariably met with angry protests and outright insult.

I deny to Mr. Tree the right to accuse any commentator of injustice in uttering such criticism of his work as appeared over my pen-name. Just as I proclaimed the Kendals guilty of wretched taste and outrageous behavior in vituperating those American communities that failed to patronize some of their performances. We are not bound to accept with awe-struck admiration every theatrical enterprise that comes from England, merely because it does come from England and is exploited here under influential management.

What merits Mr. Tree discovered while here I was quick to acknowledge and record. I pointed out that he was very skillful in the matter of make-up; that in point of optical illusion he possessed much cunning. But I also insinuated that in my opinion that did not constitute greatness in acting nor did it justify the vast pretensions put forth in Mr. Tree's behalf.

If grease-paint, rouge-pot and wig give genius or art to an actor, then Mr. Tree has half a score of peers among native players of whom no one makes much account. If ingenuity in suggesting the outer show of a character, in attaining convincing fidelity of detail, is the essential of scenic surpassing, then the companies presenting Mr. Hoyt's farces, for example, are marvels of dramatic genius. For, thanks to the playwright's peculiarly minute instructions, every actor intrusted with the impersonation of a rôle in his comediettas attains approximate perfection in the matter of make-up.

No; Mr. Tree's adeptness in such an adscititious detail does not entitle him to exalted supremacy among his kind. Were he to reach the final point of excellence in this matter he would still have mastered nothing nobler than the vulgarest trick of his trade. Consider the absurdity, then, the presumption, of asking one to give no notice to the actor's abominable elocution—his mumbling, mushing enunciation, his unintelligent reading, his disregard of the sense of his lines, his misplaced emphasis, his constant slight of the final words—because of his skill in a mean and paltry device in which he may be surpassed by any competent wig-maker or costumer. "Never was such manner of speech heard from an actor of Mr. Tree's pretensions and patronage," I wrote in the review against whose justice he made insistent protest. "A dozen rows from the stage put one out of understanding of his utterances. It is not that he mouths—in contempt of

Hamlet—but that he minces his words abominably, and then, to cap the climax of this outrage upon enunciation, swallows the hashed and chopped syllables beyond recovery."

There have been actors so prodigally endowed by chance with the qualities of personal magnetism, temperament, spirit, the divine fire, that they dominated such monstrous faults as this. But Mr. Tree does not belong in the category of such fortunates. In recognition of his limitations in this regard I granted, in the review to which reference has just been made, that "it were not wholly fair to judge him from the standpoint of emotional effectiveness. Measured by that standard Beerbohm Tree might be dismissed summarily as inconsiderable; for the actor is quite incapable to start a responsive thrill in his auditor." For this temperamental deficiency he is not to be blamed. Rather is he to be commiserated. It is the one defect that bars a score of native actors, whose names one rarely sees outside of the *dramatis personæ* of the programmes, from the lists of the elect.

We heard much during Mr. Tree's sojourn among us of the aptness and realistic quality of the by-play, the "business" with which he decorated an impersonation. An infinity of fine phrase was turned in praise of the "naturalness" with which he ate pie in his characterization of *Gringoire*. A dozen Americans, in scenes cast in railway-station lunch-rooms, have eaten as much pie, eaten it as ravenously, with as much counterfeit of gustatory delight; but for some reason

the English actor's performance of the feat in the palace of Louis XI. was deemed worthy of rapturous applause. The fact that in the same scene he murdered the exquisite verses "It is the Orchard of the King"—losing their meaning, reciting them badly—counted for nothing against such an artistic marvel as the half-frantic consumption of a short-crust pudding!

All these distinctive excellences in Mr. Tree's art I acknowledged with due appreciation in the criticism that he deemed unique because of its "injustice" and "unkindness." How much value they possess, in my opinion, in the equation of dramatic supremacy, I hinted in these words: "When one ponders the æsthetic value of such incidents, the rare intelligence required for their invention and artful discovery, the fervid imagination necessary to their due proportion and fit coloring, one is ready to fall in with the general clamor and proclaim the stranger infinitely worthier of applause and frequence than a half-score of native actors ordinarily regarded as of no particular importance. The circumstance that Mr. Tree stands in need of an instructor in elemental elocution, or of such declamatory exercises as enabled Demosthenes to enunciate decently, should be disregarded in view of his cunning with grease-paint and his frank employment of the commonplace."

There was but a single purpose in the manner and matter of these statements, and that was to indicate—with as little brutality as possible, and with all due consideration for a stranger bent upon showing us his

ambitious endeavors in the realm of theatric craft—that Mr. Tree was at best an actor of the second rate, and one whom the community should not accept for more than his worth. As for the "unkindness" of which he complains—when I recall the amazing blunders of the actor in the mere elements of his calling, I confess that I am surprised at the moderation of my phrases.

The episode makes pertinent some general remarks on the subject of the English invasion of the American theatre. Recent seasons have brought us several British players of about Mr. Tree's rank, and we were invariably expected to take without question and without complaining whatever crudeness and inadequacy they might offer for our delectation. They come here preceded by a great trumpeting of their artistic and social eminence at home. They are exploited here in the theatres of the first reputation under management of rare prestige. Every contrivance of bluster, influence and shrewdness is brought into play to intimidate criticism and impress the public. With the result that before the community has awakened to the delusion, false gods have taken place in the temple of Thespis and the general is worshiping brummagem idols instead of the true deities.

One does not begrudge the humbugs the votive offerings of gold that are showered upon them. If the evil ended with the bills-of-exchange with which they return home, one could not bring himself to utter a word of protest. But these quacks and charlatans,

presuming upon the ridiculous favor with which their fakir-tricks are received, set up a deceptive cult that must eventually corrupt the taste of the people and work the complete demoralization of the American theatre. No one cares to lessen by an iota the monetary gain of a Wilson Barrett, a Beerbohm Tree, a Nethersole or Millward, or the Kendal family; but when it is sought to convince us that these are exemplars of the highest form of the dramatic art, then, I maintain, it is the bounden duty of criticism to protest in the interest of the common good. Their profit they are welcome to; but their right to travel from end to end of the country, posing as masters of the actor's craft—that one may with all reason deny them.

Think of the evil wrought to the general taste by some of the more preposterous performances of the Kendals! It will take years to correct the harm that this twain have been able to accomplish by reason of their extraordinary vogue and the absurdly invalid repute they have enjoyed as artists. As in the case of Mr. Tree and some others, one would gladly grant them whatever fortune they may gather from the unsophistical Americans, if that were the end of the story. If the people thronged to see them out of frank curiosity, or because of the asinine interest with which we regard everything English, all the time keeping in mind the true limitations and obvious falsities of the performers, then one could view with patience or even indifference the unearned frequence of the counterfeits. But they pass current for standards of perfect art!

There's the rub. There are thousands of men and women in the United States, persons of average intelligence, education and taste, who have been cozened or frightened into believing the Kendals and Trees and Wilson Barretts and Bernhard-Beeres and Nethersoles final criterions of the theatric art.

It is high time, in my opinion, that the folly and peril of this notion were plainly set forth. It is high time that we cease our adoration of imported humbugs, simply because of their foreign origin. If the public is not to be deterred, for instance, from regarding seriously such a performance as I saw given by the Kendals on the occasion of their last appearance in the metropolis, then we may indeed despair of any improvement in the native theatre. Never shall I forget the rasping tone, the pervading banality, the studied meanness of that presentation of "A Scrap of Paper."

Every circumstance of the performance seemed to imply on the part of its responsible factors either complete contempt for the cultivation of the audience or else utter misunderstanding of its fancies. To one familiar with the real quality of "Les Pattes de Mouche" the travesty presented as an adaptation was irritating, maddening beyond endurance. Sardou's most exquisite device of polite raillery, elegant piquancy, dainty, delicious comedy distorted into a nondescript something suburban, yokelish, bourgeois beyond expression!

It needed good nerves to resist the temptation to cry

out against the insulting insinuation. One felt like standing up in his place and shouting: "How dare you! *How dare you!!* HOW DARE YOU!!!—take this model of dramatic grace and comic refinement, this master-work of wit and manners, and disfigure it into the semblance of a barnyard farce? Would you imply that we are dolts and boors and bumpkins, and that we could not appreciate or understand Sardou's gem in its original form? Is it your purpose to indicate, by this means, your low opinion of our intelligence, imagination and taste?

"Look at your company, you worse than vandals! You, who come here with mighty pretensions as to care in *mise-en-scène*, perfection in detail, regard for ensemble, to cast provincial amateurs, rural barnstormers, men and women without talent, grace, personal distinction, in rôles of the modish quality of the characters in 'Les Pattes de Mouche'! Note the dress of the shoddy assemblage—the ill-fitting garb of the men, the slovenly gowns of the women. Would you venture to parade such sidewalk dummies in an English theatre of like rank?"

That is how one fretted to call out to these sham artists who put up punch-and-judy shows and demand that we accept them for products of the highest academy of the drama. Only, of course, had one given way to the temptation a horde of ushers, doorkeepers and special policemen would have fallen upon the vociferous enthusiast and haled him off to the nearest station-house, where he would have been promptly

proclaimed a drunk-and-disorderly and duly fined. So, instead, one had no recourse but to rush from the theatre, walk briskly down Broadway, and relieve his over-wrought feelings in some good round oaths.

The Influence of Mrs. Potter and Mr. Bellew

The Influence of Mrs. Potter and Mr. Bellew

THE conspicuous change in the attitude of critics and public toward Mrs. Potter and Mr. Bellew, on the occasion of their last venture here, was both interesting and instructive. Hitherto, this twain of actors and the plays in which they exploited their craft had been fleered at in the metropolitan community: flouted, derided by the dramatic reviewers; neglected, forsaken by the public, until at last it seemed as if two of the boldest spirits and most distinct personalities in the contemporary theatre would be driven forever to make the hazard of regard and livelihood in kindlier countries.

But an amazing reversal of conditions marked the timid re-entry of Mrs. Potter and Mr. Bellew into the metropolis—or its outskirts, rather. Throughout their engagement at a suburban theatre the house was frequented by large audiences and on some occasions was uncomfortably thronged. The attending crowds seemed genuinely interested in the work of the chief actors. Applause was spontaneous and, of course, pertinent. The concern of the audience in the ambition of the players and in the medium of its presentation was obviously sincere and dignified, and not—as in the

past—meanly curious. In brief, to speak in the vernacular, the venture was a popular success.

Far more astounding, though, than this resultant of the reversal of general opinion, was the sudden realization of the critical fraternity that Mrs. Potter and Mr. Bellew are actors of notable attainments and of some rare gifts. And that they have been occupying themselves for several years with the best in their calling, instead of with that which is paltry and pernicious, and so more likely to attain favor and gain. It were difficult to recall even from comprehensive memories of the theatre such another instance of radical revolution in criticism, unless is be the stampede of the dolts and the doubters that followed Mary Anderson's impersonation of *Perdita*—after its glorious acclaim in London.

An amusing feature of the tardy justice accorded Mrs. Potter and Mr. Bellew by the dramatic writers of the newspapers was their pretension that never before had these actors proved themselves worthy of commendation, and that only now they had discovered the qualities of grace, sincerity, imagination, polish and the refinements that come from nice intelligence and persistent care. Some of the professional reviewers—among them several who had been especially purblind to even the obvious distinctions of these players—patted themselves on the back with much self-approval for their courage in correcting, or, rather, changing, their previous opinions and acknowledging the vast "improvement" in Mrs. Potter and her professional associate.

In view of the wholly exceptional circumstances of the former's adventure into the theatre, the unfamiliar and fantastic episodes attending her theatrical career in its beginning, there was perhaps some excuse for their failure to recognize the real merits of the case. Talents and aspirations must always expect slight and skepticism if they try to make their way out of the beaten course of conventionality.

But in the case of Mr. Bellew the excuse was invalid to the point of absurdity. To pretend that an actor whom they now hailed as the peer of Irving had until that moment been unworthy of commendation, hardly worthy, indeed, of serious consideration, is asking too much of one's patience. It did not need that completely illusive impersonation of *Marat* in "Charlotte Corday" to prove Bellew's capabilities. He showed himself, long ago, not only a master of his trade, but a player of unusual natural gifts: fancy, spirit, authority, and, above all, the temperamental versatility that is the essence of conviction in characterization. He is now, and he has been for years, one of the very best actors on the English-speaking stage—or any other stage, for that matter. In all the important features of such a work, his *Marat* was no better than was his *Antony* of several years before. Instead of shifting the brunt of a blunder on the player under notice, it would have been honest to confess that earlier criticism of Mr. Bellew was distorted by stupid prejudices and ignoble personalities. It was not Mr. Bellew who had "improved." It was the critics who had "improved,"

and the "improvement" was in their conscience rather than in their acumen. At any rate, let us hope that, in charity to their intelligence and fitness for their work.

That there had been something of an "improvement" in the case of Mrs. Potter one may grant the critics, for the sake of the labored explanation of their previous injustice or stupidity. It is inevitable, even, that an experiencc of five or six years, under conditions more varied and instructive than those influencing the career of any other American actress—custom and confidence gleaned in the theatres of England, Australia, South Africa, the British capitals in India, Japan, China—wherever, indeed, enough of English-speaking men and women have gathered to make up an audience capable of delighting in stage classics—it follows as a matter of course that from such experience there should have come certain qualities of ease, surety, familiarity with the mechanics of the craft. And to the unthinking observer, such adscititious adeptness means essential "improvement."

But it is well to remember that in all that pertains to inherent aptitude for her calling Mrs. Potter is identically the same entity to-day that she was before she took on the tricks of the trade that suddenly aroused her judges to a sense of her deserts. In the qualities that compelled her to the vocation of the theatre, she shone out quite as brilliantly years ago as she did on yesterday up at the Harlem Opera House. She may, in truth, have been wanting in the petty, insignificant cart-horse conventions that are deemed by

some synonymous with "art" and "improvement"; but in all that goes to make up an actress of charm and command, to warm the fancy, delight imagination, satisfy ideality, Mrs. Potter was as fully deserving of encouragement and applause then as now. Her early *Thérèse Raquin* was no whit less illuminative of her gifts than was her later *Charlotte Corday*. And I cannot resist the temptation to quote, in this connection, words written on the occasion of Mrs. Potter's first presentation in New York of Zola's superb play:

"To what degree have I been impelled to this sense of impressiveness of 'Thérèse Raquin' by the strangely insinuating personality of the chief figure in the presentation, I am not quite certain. Perhaps an actress of less wondrous charm than Mrs. Potter, less innately fine in her emotions and expressions, or less exquisitively sensitive and subtle in the outer show of feeling, might have justified the general sentiment as to the morale of the play.

"Whatever may be the real temperament of this woman, in her physical qualities she seems the very incarnation of soul. It looks out from those languorous, liquid eyes; it nestles in the drooping meshes of silken hair; it trembles on the petal-thin nostrils; lingers on the close-chiseled lips; pervades the supple, pliant figure, transforming the woman into a glowing ethereality scintillant with sensitive emotion, radiant with untempered love. Against the murky background of Zola's picture of Care, this rare figure moves in bodily semblance of Psyche, hovering lightly over the mean-

ness and shame of her surroundings, untouched seemingly by her own dreadful sin. In the atmosphere of her almost pathetically beautiful personality 'Thérèse Raquin' takes on the dignity of a tragic poem, the inspiration of an Eastern dirge."

I am willing to endure the charge of bad taste in citing my own words to corroborate the contention in this affair if thereby I succeed in suggesting to the reader that the complete change in the temper of critics and public was due to something other than "improvement" in the actress. And one should be all the more ready to yield to the argument implied, because the conclusion is decidedly creditable to the genius of the community; it indicates a sharp advance, within a very brief period, in both our ethics and æsthetics. It is not so much the actress that has "improved" as it is we who have grown in taste and intelligence and courage.

Much of the blame put upon Mrs. Potter and Mr. Bellew in the past had its source, probably, in a popular distaste for the plays with which they elected to occupy their talents. Let me hasten to say that in my opinion they were excellent plays. But they displeased the critics, and so the public stayed away. Or else the public stayed away, and so the critics found the plays execrable. It is difficult to differentiate cause from effect in such matters.

In the light of subsequent events, it seems incredible that the popular and professional opposition to the plays in which Mrs. Potter and Mr. Bellew presented themselves on their previous venture in the metropolis

should have been based on the immorality or indelicacy of such dramas as "Françillon" and "Thérèse Raquin." But who does not recall the revolt of the Innocents on the occasion of the first presentation of Zola's play? Such an uprising of horrified squeamishness we shall probably never witness again in our lifetime. Zola was too much for us in those days. Zola, who is a veritable prude in comparison with the present lights of the theatre!

"In matters of art and letters," I find that I wrote, in those sweet, departed days before we were ruined—"particularly the letters of the stage, where we cannot avoid betraying our tastes and fancies to our neighbors, we are a nation of boys and virgins. It would shame our shrinking chastity, suffuse our lily-white natures with the pink of pudicity if we thought to discover in 'Thérèse Raquin' something besides the frank brutality of Zola's theme, the unflinching methods of its treatment, the masterly development of effective details——"

We were so sensitive in those days! And because we were so timid and shrinking that plays like "Thérèse" and "Françillon" made us blush to the roots of our hair, we railed at the chief protagonists and denied them a single leaf of the laurel that now were showered upon them. But that is because they had "improved"? Cant of the worst sort, that. And if you doubt it, pray contrast our reception a few years ago of "Thérèse" and "Françillon" with the subsequent vogue of "The Conquerors," "The Case of Rebellious Susan," "Magda," "Honor," "The Turtle," and "Zaza."

The Retirement of the Dean and Its Inspiration

The Retirement of the Dean and Its Inspiration

IN all his graceful career as an actor Joseph Jefferson never did the stage so great a service as when he left it.

I allude, of course, to the manner, not to the fact, of his retirement. The circumstances, or rather the consequences, of his recent withdrawal from the theatre are rich with significance and promise, when regarded closely and equanimously. To me the event seems easily the most salient and pregnant feature of the recent scene-while.

For years enough to take in the experience of the present generation of play-patrons, Mr. Jefferson has been appearing in a very few dramas whose epochal worth has been celebrated almost from their first production—dramas that the world would not willingly let die. And yet their fame with the multitude did not equal that of Mr. Jefferson in their presentation. Indeed, so completely has the actor been identified in the popular mind with the chief rôle of each of these very few masterpieces, that any hazard of the parts by other actors would have seemed treason against the dearest traditions of the stage. I have met persons who believed that Mr. Jefferson owned the copyright

of "The Rivals." The plays in reference, for all their ancient fame, became subservient to the actor's peerless popularity and his curious individuality. The relative values of the actor and the medium of his exhibition were utterly confounded to the general.

Upon Mr. Jefferson devolved the duty—duty to his guild and his genius—to dispel this malefic confusion. And he did the work with a brilliant daring and final completeness that ought forever to settle the question involved. When failing physical strength lately forced him to doff the splendid mantle of half a century of scenic command, he promptly, and with not the slightest show of misgiving, hung it on the shoulders of his sons.

Therein lies the tremendous service that the adored actor has done the stage at the moment of his retirement. For by this apparently simple act Mr. Jefferson has indicated the supreme importance of the play and the virtual insignificance of the player. Readers of my theatrical reviews that have appeared over the signature of "The First-Nighter" will understand why I have so eagerly seized upon an incident of such influence and authority that confirms my own persistently expressed views on the subject. In the conviction that the progress of the American theatre depended on a popular realization of the comparative paltriness of acting and the supremacy of the thing acted, I have contended for approximate elimination of the former in consideration of dramatic adventures.

Some persons may object that I misconstrue the motives and significance of Mr. Jefferson's recent measure; that what I deem an ingenious and masterful scheme to dispel a popular delusion is simply an act of paternal fondness, a natural plan to exploit the potency of a great name. But regard for Mr. Jefferson's character and career prompts and justifies the more inspiriting view. The very circumstances of the case compel to this. The several sons to whom he has committed the easy task of keeping in vogue the really admirable two or three plays of his repertory are actors of no particular reputation, whatever their merits may be. They are, I believe, very young men, of scant experience in their trade and of no more perilous ambitions than to carry on the business of presenting the beautiful classics with which their patronymic is identified.

That Mr. Jefferson is confident of the event is obvious from the readiness with which he surrendered to them the easy responsibilities involved. It is as if he had suddenly resolved to show a great light to the public; a light that he, in the clear and sensitive vision of experience with masterpieces of dramatic composition, must have discerned long ago. "You have dwelt in error," he seems to say to the multitude; "you have given yourself over to a kind of mummer-worship and forgotten the ancient faith in the true gods of the playhouse. If I have vantaged from this idolatrous cult, it has been innocently and unwittingly, through no hocus-pocus of my own wishing. It is

time that you turned back to the faith that gave the stage its noblest priests. The plays that my stripling descendants will present before you are the same wherein I have delighted and enlightened you for half a century. You will see now how little they owe for charm and effectiveness to any peculiar quality or affectation of the individual actor. You will see that they would have been great plays even if I had never been born; that they will remain great and attractive dramas when I have ceased to live. The sons in whose favor I have withdrawn are merely ordinary players, with no important experience and no marked conspicuosity in their calling; but from me they have had the best that was in my career, the body of it and the essence of it—the play!"

That is the message that the most adored of living American actors gave to the world, by implication, upon his retirement. Well will it be for the stage, for that part of the stage that really counts in the economy of artistic culture, if the lesson be properly taken home to men's bosoms. Were Mr. Jefferson to have founded and endowed a theatre to be conducted regardless of cost or profit, were he to have given the American public an institution like the Théâtre Français or the Court Opera of Bavaria, he would not have served the stage so prodigiously and with such assured permanency as by the simple course of bidding the community recognize that it was not he, but the plays in which he appeared, that drew their patronage for fifty years. The circumstance that his

designated successors are his sons does not detract from the import of his act. Indeed, the more inconsiderable in achievement and fame those to whom he assigned the dignity of presenting the two or three masterpieces under notice, the more telling is the force of his stroke.

With absorbing interest, I, for one, shall watch for the effects of this blow at the Mummer-Isis. It will be curious to note whether the silent dynamic of Mr. Jefferson's retirement accomplishes what has hitherto withstood the attacks of philosophy, wit and good taste.

In the scheme that puts the player in his proper place—that of complete subserviency to the medium of his exhibition—there is vastly more kindness than would appear at first glance. By its adoption I have evaded—yes, evaded, I confess it—many obligations to rebuke unpardonable presumption on the part of certain impudent spirits. Ah, I could cite instances in plenty; but you shall not have them from me. Instances of second-rate players made into "stars" overnight, who gave performances of such hopeless incompetency as to be genuinely pathetic. To have proclaimed the truth of their mean limitations, to have aroused the public to a sense of the fraud, to have proved—as was easy enough—that only the accidents of the part essayed saved the performer from being damned by ridicule into oblivion, was, to me, so hateful in its just severity that I rejoiced in my resolve of reticence. How vastly better to ignore the failure of the player—a factor that is only a fleeting cipher in the

problem of theatric art and progress—and confine criticism to the play, without which the other would have absolutely no existence as a scenic entity. Our stage is to-day filled with players of vast popularity and much critical consideration who are utterly ignorant of the merest mechanics of their calling: men and women enjoying all the products of vogue and fame, who merit only tolerance from the standpoint of honest art and individual equipment. They doubtless deserve to have their fraudulency exposed; to be shown up in all their intellectual pettiness, their temperamental deficiencies, their poverty of such attainments in a craft as come with mere zeal and study. But I confess I have not the heart for the work.

Why not, someone may ask, why not omit mention of their defects and proclaim only that which is good, seeing there is some good in everything? Because that would be flattery, not criticism. Censure is the essential virtue of criticism. The highest authority in letters has decreed that.

Such complacency as has been suggested is only too prevalent here and now. It may be kind, but it certainly is cowardly and vicious and evil-working. I can find an excuse to remain silent on the subject of mummers and their empty pretensions: but I could not find an excuse to falsify the truth or gloss it with deluding tinsel. Besides, I have always maintained that the final utility of criticism is a thing quite apart from consideration of such an evanescent element as the author's mouthpiece and puppet.

It might be said—indeed, it has been said—that my arguments in advocacy of a generous oblivion for actors apply equally well to playwrights; that the mercy that finds expression in silence might, with equal reason, go out to their blunders and audacities. Why criticise the worker-in-letters with a frankness, bluntness and severity deemed cruel in the case of actors? To that I reply that the performance of a playwright is the product of intelligence, presumably; the performance of an actor is nothing of the sort, necessarily. Play-making is an art; acting merely an accident. The man qualified to make a play of any considerable merit is generally a person of sufficient mental training, moral calm and æsthetic impersonality to comprehend the purpose of criticism and appreciate its spirit. Not so the actor, whose calling requires an egotism, vanity and temperamental immodesty that construe analysis into a personal insult. Finally, too, the playwright is capable of profiting by the lessons and intimations of his censors. But the actor——

In Tribute to Some Threatened
Landmarks

In Tribute to Some Threatened Landmarks

WE may well deem it a piece of ill news that the big playhouse in the Fourteenth Street is presently to forego its ancient character and suffer change into what is known as a continuous-performance house —a kind of barbarous hurdy-gurdy show where dancing-women, ballad-mongers, Persian jugglers, fire-eaters, clowns and such other vanities hold forth from cock-crow to the third watch. Ill news, I say, because this theatre is the last of our playhouses to remain by the pristine traditions of the stage, the last whose conduct is according to customs approved by the politest tastes, the last to present for the diversion of its patrons only such comedies and tragedies and players as have received the hall-mark of abiding merit. As a consequence of which it has continued the especially favored rendezvous of the most modish company in town, frequented beyond all its rivals by the first fashion, the deepest learning and the rarest wits. Indeed, it is not too much to say that such an assemblage as I lately encountered there, when Madame Morris appeared in a monstrous fine play that was brought over from France, could not be met in another playhouse in town, tho' the Grand Lama

himself were on view. In their attire they were to the last degree genteel, and their deportment, being at once free and regardful each of his neighbor's comfort, would have attested their urbane breeding, even without the elegance of their equipage: many of the coaches being hung on the new-fangled springs and drawn by Belgian nags with tails sweeping the ground.

I could not but notice that the company arrived at the playhouse much earlier than is the habit in other parts of the town, and that the footmen, in many instances, instead of resuming place on the box after their masters had alighted, betook themselves to the top tier where, it is to be presumed, accommodation had been bespoken for them.

By the half-after-seven the house was full, tho' many of the gentlemen and their ladies must have driven all the way from the Second Avenue, Stuyvesant Square, Gansevoort Place, and even Bowling Green and the Battery for aught I know contrariwise.

Once they were well disposed in their places, the fiddlers struck up some musick, now grave, now gay, that the bill-of-the-play declared to be from an opera-piece by Mr. Verdi and named "La Traviata." Which gratuitous and seemingly unexpected diversion was vastly agreeable to the spectators; so that when the fiddlers rested their kits there followed forthwith a pretty disorder, the gentlemen bouncing lustily with their sticks and the ladies patting their little hands together and crying bravo! bravo! with the cheeriest

clamor to be imagined. While above, in the tiers, where the less polite were fortifying themselves for the tragedy with lollypops and ginger-beer, there was such a turmoil as few of us had heard since the evening that Mr. Forrest's friends hissed Mr. Macready in the Astor Place Opera House.

But I should hasten to add that once the curtain went up there was complete silence and stillness in the audience during the whole action, save when some brave speech or noble declamation or witty home-thrust stirred the spectators beyond endurance. Then even the soberest and most composed in the company was not above voicing his approval or discontent, as the case might be. So that the actor was left in no doubt as to the spectators' opinion of him and his ways. And I for one did not envy the poor devil who was called upon to impersonate the infamous *Count de Varville*, the unconscionable rake who sought to buy *Camille's* love with gold. Had he heard the comments passed upon his behavior in the stalls and boxes he would have been out of conceit with himself for many a day. And, what is more, I should not have answered for his security, had certain ruder spirits in the topmost tier gotten hands on him. *Madame Prudence*, too, for all her being of the sex, came in for some blunt epithets—whispered, of course, between the gentlemen—for her constant borrowings from the imprudent *Camille*, without leaving so much as a post-obit in exchange or an I. O. U.

For the unfortunate lady who so obligingly winked

at her own undoing in order to supply the wherewith of this diverting play—since I make bold to doubt that the piece would have been written but for her peccadilloes, which were of no great pleasure to her, I warrant you—the spectators showed only the most lively sympathy. The smartest belles in the boxes, the sprucest fops in the stalls, did not shame to weep plenteously when Madame Morris protested to Armand's father the profound passion that she had conceived for his son, while the mob at the top of the house paid their respects to the gentleman in no uncertain language, tho' for my part I can easily understand the solicitude with which he would contemplate the young man's infatuation for the baggage. Still, it could not but lift one's spirits into a most lively pleasure to find the company so quick of emotion and so frank in its expression; it being the fashion in most playhouses, I have noticed, to pretend to an indifference seasoned alike against satisfaction and discontentment. And I deem it a notable token of good sense and right judgment of the spectators that the abounding sorrow of the tragedy did not dwell so much upon their imagination that they had no heart for its humor. Thus, when *Monsieur Gaston*, in the fourth act, declares that whether a lady really loves us or only says so, 'tis the same thing—for we can never tell when they do or when they don't, their words being all alike and woman being but woman—the house laughed consumedly at the witticism, and several fellows of notorious industry in gallantry were

observed to look sheepish. While a few of the decayed bucks shook their heads in approvement of the author's discernment.

Again, when the villainous *Count de Varville* makes query of *Camille:* "Who was that odd-looking sort of person—Monsieur—Monsieur—Something—that Madame Prudence introduced here?" To which the lady replied: "That *gentleman*, look you, sir, was Monsieur Armand Duval—that is who that *gentleman* was," laying much stress upon the word, the house cheered most heartily in every part, proving the spectators to be of keen sensibility and of a nice appreciation for the lady's loyalty. For in many playhouses the pretty stratagem would have passed for nothing, or, at the very least, fallen short of proper demonstration. And when at last the poor French lady, whose undeserved griefs were unfolded in the action of the tragedy, was seized with a croup that liked to cause her a fluxion in full view of the company, several beauties—among them some who have no small reputation for cruelty and chill-heartedness—did snivel audibly, while the gentlemen made a lame pretense to seem unconcerned by a sudden scrutiny of their signet rings or an unholy blowing of their noses.

Yet, for my part, I see no reason why one should shame to weep in publick at such a desperate sad play, even tho' it be out of the fashion, as I am told, either to grieve with the players when fate has distrest them or to laugh when they are merry. Indeed, one who is a frequent customer of the playhouse

in the Fourteenth Street and who is familiar likewise with the habits in other parts of the town, gives me assurance that nowhere else does the company make such a brave show of agreement with the action in all its qualities of tears or mirth.

I could not but notice with curiosity and surprise the respect—aye, the interest and affection—in which the ladies and gentlemen on the stage—especially such as were tender and gallant in the play—were held by the spectators. This I could not but remark in contrast with the manners in other parts of the town, where 'tis the custom to make light of the poor devils who sweat and toil for the publick's entertainment and to affect regard only for the author.

'Twas quite otherwise on the occasion that I heard the tragical history of The Lady Who Had a Mind for Camellias in the Fourteenth Street. Each and every one of the band of players was applauded according to his or her deserts, be his or her part in the action never so inconsequential or contemptible. Thus even the gentleman whose business it is to suit the lighting of the scenes to the moment and meaning of the episode comes in for a share of the spectator's notice, albeit he did not at any point in the action discover himself to the assemblage. And none of us can tell to this day if he be of a white or black complexion. In this wise it came about: The heroine, having taken French leave of her lover about the hour when the locusts and treetoads greet impending dusk, the distrest *Armand* summons the maid *Nanine*, bid-

ding her to fetch a lamp. By a most ingenious stratagem, simultaneous with the entrance of this lamp the stage falls into darkness, whereby the somberness of the situation is mightily furthered in the imagination of the spectator, albeit he may entertain a mean opinion of the lamp. 'Twas a most fantastic device and such a one as is to be encountered in but few of the playhouses, be they never so modish. Wherefore I did not much marvel at the murmur of surprise that ran thro' the hall and the spirited observations upon the craftiness of the gentleman who had conceived the arrangement.

If the spectators were thus alert and applausive to the obscure, let one endeavor to fancy their behavior toward the better conditioned of the players.

Indeed, at times I feared mightily lest their salutes and acclamations should put some of the more timid mummers out of countenance, and so injure the illusion of the action. Thus, when Madame Morris first emerged into view there arose, my word for it, such a clamor of compliments and civilities as none of us had heard since the times when Mistress Jenny Lind led the town to Castle Garden. And I urge it to the celebration of the lady's modesty that she was hard put to it to retain her composure when one cried half aloud to a friend in the box that Madame was still "of a wondrous fine aspect"; and another exclaimed, so that all about him could not but hear, that she was "beautiful beyond the race of women"; while a third was content to sigh that she certainly had "the finest

eyes of any woman in the world" and knew how "to make her advantage of them." As for the ladies, they could but stare enravished at Madame's frocks, which, I am free to admit, spoke volumes of the prodigality of the villainous *Count de Varville*, knave though he be in other regards.

It should be made known to such as are diverted from frequence of the playhouse in the Fourteenth Street, either by reason of residence in a distant end of the town, or disinclination for the manner of entertainment generally put up there, or what-not, that Madame Morris is held in the most distinguished esteem and profound admiration of any of the strolling players that make exhibition of their attainments in that vicinage. I had the good fortune on the occasion of viewing the tragedy of the Camellia-Lady to have for neighbor on the right a gentleman who was polite enough to instruct me in the matter of the year when the favored player first took the part in which she was then posturing. He had never since missed to come in from his estate on Long Island to refresh his delight in her exhibition, save once when the ill condition of the roads threatened the safety of his coach, again when the town was down with influenza, and a third time when the chroniclers hinted that Madame Morris would appear as *Juliet*, for which sort of namby-pamby farcing my informant declared he had no stomach.

There was fine opportunity to enjoy the polished conversation of this gentleman, because of the gener-

ous intervals between the acts at this particular playhouse, where 'tis no uncommon thing for thirty and even forty-five minutes to separate the distinct parts of the action: this cheery custom abiding from the times—according to one account—when the gentlemen and ladies were given to visiting the pasty-shop over the way and beguiling the tedium between the several components of the playbill with a dish of coffee.

And yet another account has it that the amazing procrastination, whereby the fiddlers are called upon to play all the tunes they know and then to play them over again and even again, is to be credited to Madame Morris alone, who, being unable to sleep after midnight, is put to it to woo slumber in the intervals between the acts.

Be that as it may, the customers of the hall are the gainers thereby, since 'tis rare they are not dismissed to their homes in season to escape the Mohocs that infest the purlieus, while they have proper leisure for the exchange of the civilities natural to a company partaking of the same common entertainment.

Tho' it has been my notorious practice to hazard no judgment on the merits or demerits of the individual performers in an action—deeming any criticism of players to be an endless, frivolous, and impertinent pursuit—I feel constrained to repeat some of the precise and tasteful observations that the gentleman from Long Island passed upon Madame Morris in the protracted interval preceding the last act. It transpired that despite his remote residence from the town he

contrived in his time to view many of her most specious rivals. The Mesdames Modjeska, Bernhardt, Duse—each and all enacted the tragical tale with some especial virtues. But they differed, he explained, from Madame Morris. "Thus," quoth he in instance, "it has been given to no woman—French, Polish, Italian, or what-not—to cough as does Madame Morris, in show of the ailment that consumes her inwardly throughout the action of the tragedy. They do but hem and haw, so to speak, and emit plaintive, timorous wheezes: a fashion of by-your-leave coughing that in contrast with the pulmonic tumult whereby Madame Morris tokens the catastrophe of the poor French lady is as the pipe of the sparrow to the roar of the bull." And I here record agreement with the gentleman that, for my own part, I too have never heard such monstrous fine coughing. Assuredly, 'twas amazing good acting!

In this opinion I was the more surely established by the vision of a number of pretty, painted light-o'-loves, whose guady feathers and mock jewels proclaimed their trade; albeit the reddened eyes and tear-stained cheeks whereby they tokened sorrow for the griefs of the Camellia-Lady spoke much for the honest simplicity of their hearts. And as I passed out of the playhouse I could not but animadvert upon the morals of a piece that thus prompted to pity creatures supposed to be callous to the sweeter emotions. Tho' I cannot but relate that I overheard one of the spectators observe to his companion—whom I took to be his grand-

nephew—that to his mind the young man *Armand* was well out of the affair and that in all likelihood if the Camellia-Lady had continued in good health in the end she would have taken the law of him on a trumpery charge of his having engaged to marry her; so that it would have cost his family a pretty penny before they were quit.

The Out-of-Town Audience

The Out-of-Town Audience

"A GOOD play, a very good play," said the Manager, after the applause had subsided, "but not for out-of-town."

The Critic admitted that the phase of life depicted was, perhaps, peculiar to the metropolis.

"No, it isn't that," the Manager dissented; "they don't object particularly to the 'local' quality. But, hang it, they won't like this."

"And yet you think it very good."

"Yes; it's too good, to be blunt about it."

"No play can be too good," the Critic droned with characteristic sententiousness.

"Not for New York—no; out-of-town, though, is another matter. They don't like them when they are too good—especially if they've succeeded in New York."

"How about the metropolitan run and prestige you managers are always so anxious for?"

"That is excellent for bad plays. It hurts good ones."

"But surely all the plays that prosper in New York do not fail on the road?"

"No; the poor ones that succeed here do even better in the provinces."

"And the rule does not hold in the case of the others?"

"No; as a rule, the rule doesn't rule with the good plays that New York indorses."

"That sounds interesting, even if a little confused. You say that a bad play is more likely to succeed out-of-town than a good one."

"Not exactly. I say that a bad play that by some chance or circumstance has 'caught on' or, rather, 'hung on' here will fare better in the country than a fine one that pleased New York."

"Humph; I can't understand that," the Critic sniffed incredulously.

"Nor I either," the Manager confessed. "If I could, I wouldn't be making the same blunder, year after year, trying to convince myself that I'm wrong about it."

"Are out-of-town audiences harder to please?" the Critic asked, as if in suggestion.

"No, they're easier—that's the trouble. When you give them anything as good as this"—indicating the play in reference—"they get suspicious."

The Critic was obviously perplexed.

"Oh, I don't pretend to explain the mental process involved in the case," the Manager went on. "I'm only telling you facts."

The Critic ventured the guess that the out-of-town audience likes to think itself "difficult," as the French say. "And so when a play is tremendously good, they can't resist the chance to reverse the metropolitan judgment," he added.

The Manager shook his head approvingly.

"I shouldn't wonder if that was it—in part, at any rate," he chimed in. "Perhaps they feel about a New York success just as New York does about a European success."

The Critic promptly elevated his eyebrows. "I don't quite catch you," he snapped tartly.

"Why, don't you know how ready New Yorkers are to 'jump on' something that made a great hit in London and Paris and Berlin and Vienna, Rome, St. Petersburg and all the European capitals?"

"No—I've surely not observed any such tendency—not on the part of my critical colleagues, at any rate."

"Well, I don't know that I can give you many instances," the Manager responded meekly, "but I remember that when 'Cavalleria Rusticana' was first brought out here New York turned up its nose at it, and asked if that was the thing all Europe was raving over! And you may recall that 'Hansel and Gretl' was positively laughed off the boards here, though every Continental capital applauded it to the skies. You may have noticed, too, that some of the most pretentious wiseacres have wondered what Europeans could have found in 'Magda' to justify its vogue and fame. Why, some of them even started to poke fun at Paris for gushing over 'Cyrano de Bergerac'!"

The Critic declared that he failed to see the connection.

"Of course there's no accounting for tastes," the Manager went on, as if to fill in the hiatus in his

companion's mind, "and I only cited those cases to prove that you might be right in your notion about out-of-town audiences."

The Critic did not push the discussion along those lines. That New York should reject a European success from the same motive that induced "provincials," in turn, to reject a New York success was too absurd for consideration. "Tell me," he bade the Manager, "may not the variance in judgments be due to the variance in the 'first-night' audiences? An out-of-town 'first-night'——"

"There is no such thing as an out-of-town 'first-night,'" the Manager interrupted. "Not as we understand a 'first-night' in New York."

When the Critic looked to him for an explanation of this paradox the Manager went on, still more confusingly: "If there is any 'first-night,' it comes on the second night, or even the third, of the engagement."

"Whom do you play to, then, on the initial evening of the venture?"

"To the 'press,' the friends of the 'press,' the local management, the friends of the local management, to the 'bill-boards,' the 'lithographs,' the friends of the 'lithographs,' and to whatever is needed to 'dress up' the house."

"No one else?"

"Oh, yes; in every community there are a few—literally a precious few—daring and reckless souls who venture their dollar-and-a-half on the show with a

metropolitan reputation; but there are not enough of them to constitute a 'first-night' as we understand it here."

"In New York," the Critic observed, as if to himself, "a first-night audience is almost as well satisfied with a failure as with a success."

"More so, more so," the Manager said—also as if to himself. "But it isn't so out-of-town. That is why an out-of-town 'first-night' isn't really a 'first-night.' If the report gets out through the 'press' and local management and 'bill-boards' and 'lithographs' and stage-hands and other similar agencies that the show is all right, you get your 'first-night' the next evening."

"And failing such a favorable report?"

"You don't have any 'first-night,'" the Manager answered with a conviction obviously born of experience. "You simply wait for the end of the engagement and listen to the reasons for the catastrophe advanced by the local experts."

"Do they ever tell you the play is too good?"

"No; they usually attribute the failure to the 'cast'—particularly if it isn't identically the same in every detail as was employed in the New York production. They won't forgive that."

"Not even if it is better?"

"Better or worse—that has nothing to do with it. Some local oracle announces that Miss Tootsey Tweedles, who appeared in the original presentation, has been replaced by Miss Totsie Twaddles, and that

settles it. Miss Twaddles may be ever so much better than Miss Tweedles, or Miss Tweedles may have died or gone abroad or been married, or done any one of a dozen things that make her engagement for the road impossible—to the out-of-town audience it is enough that she has been replaced by Miss Twaddles. Managers needn't try to fool them! If Miss Twaddles wasn't good enough for New York, she isn't good enough for them."

"That only happens," the Critic presumed, "where Miss Tweedles, for instance, happens to be a local favorite or of special renown."

"It happens," the Manager retorted with a fervor begotten, probably, of painful reminiscences, "it happens if they've never before laid eyes on either Miss Twaddles or her predecessor. The local critic has printed the names of the original cast, and any substitution they deem a reflection upon their taste and sophistication."

"Then the play is not the thing out-of town?"

"No; it's names. That is why Shakespeare is such a good card on the 'road,' and why a number of frightfully bad actors continue to live and move and have their being. The name, Shakespeare, is familiar out-of-town. They can't be deceived on that point."

This was said with a suspicion of bitterness that prompted the Critic to condole with the Manager. "You seem to take a hopeless view of the affair," he said sympathizingly.

"Not at all, not at all," the Manager protested. "We have our revenges. This beautiful play, for instance, which will crowd my theatre for two or three months, to the delight and intellectual gain of the best audiences in the country, will probably be pooh-poohed in half the places out-of-town to which, by the exigencies of business, I must send it. The organization is a costly one, and all the profits of the New York 'run' will be lost in the tour."

"A sad picture, certainly."

"But there is a companion piece much more joyous," the Manager continued cheerily. "Up the street I have half a dozen dubious comedians doing an idiotic farce. After it has run long enough to get the 'indorsement' that a poor play needs, it will go on the road and make a fortune."

"Then out-of-town audiences are of some use, after all?"

"Indeed! But for them we might never know how good a play really is—nor how bad either."

"Despite the fact that they frequently reverse the New York verdict?"

"Because of it, rather."

"One more question, please," the Critic said. "By out-of-town you mean, of course, only the minor places —not Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, San Francisco?"

I did not hear the Manager's reply. I only noticed that the Critic looked tremendously surprised, and exclaimed:

"Really! And you've never satisfied yourself as to the reason?" he asked further.

"No—unless it be the same that prompts New York to sneer at the works that London, Paris, Vienna and Rome acclaim masterpieces."

Marginalia

Marginalia

IN the collation of these scant critiques of mummers of more or less acquirements, it has seemed good to me to erase names and to conceal in other ways the identity of the performers under notice. The purpose in this method will appear from a regard of my views on the advantages of anonymity in the theatre and likewise from my firm belief that delight in particular actors or particular schemes of acting is wholly a matter of personal fancy and individual taste. Innumerable instances might be led out, arrayed in panoply of distinguished authority, to support this position; but it may suffice to recall that the dean of American critics has repeatedly asserted that Sara Bernhardt is utterly ineffective and inconsiderable save in scenes where she can slit the villain's gizzard with a skewer, and that a famous Parisian actor, after a jealous study of the American theatre, proclaimed Herbert Kelcey, then leading-man of the Lyceum Theatre, and Walter Jones, the vraisemblant tramp of "The Old Homestead," the most accomplished players that had come under his notice. And the French authority had seen the very best that our stage had to offer.

Other reasons, of more personal import, have

encouraged to the scheme that I am anxious should not be misunderstood. An experience of considerable time and variance in comment of players and playing has brought the surprising discovery that what is written of one actor may be written in precisely the same way and with equal accuracy, truth and just comprehension, of another actor. Thus, since I wrote of the crude Miss —— as "an unnecessary importation," I have had to consider several outlandish importations that proved equally unnecessary. So, too, my observations on the "illicit particularity" of the commanding Mr. —— will be found to apply closely to half a dozen actors of corresponding prominence. The *Falstaff* of the famous Mr. —— is not the only one that has been described as "lacking unction," and the scrupulous Mr. —— is not the only "actor of distinguished obscurity." Again, the poignant pleasure that prompted my celebration "of a lady's voice" was repeated, alas! only a few evenings ago, upon listening to an actress quite different in appearance and in quality of talent from the one whose performance had impelled the words. And doubtless many of my readers will spontaneously fill in the hiatus with the name of some player other than either I have in mind.

It is in a spirit of respect for such oddities of individual fancy and egoistic sensation—the dominant influences in theatrical judgments—that I prefer to allow students of the subsequent pages to supply my deliberate omissions with such names as most freely suggest themselves.

THE PERILS OF ILLICIT PARTICULARITY

It were difficult to name an American player—or, indeed, one of any country—who is Mr. ——'s superior in the quality of exquisite intelligence, in nice discrimination, or in quick sensibility of effect. These are his natural attributes, gifts of a generous Providence, and so long as he trusts to them for impression he is an actor of command and delight. But, yielding to a strange fancy for monstrous singularity, the cardinal vice of so many of his colleagues, Mr. —— has taken on an array of personal peculiarities, affectations of manner and of method, that often threaten to undo all that nature has done for him. To note how persistently and strenuously he fights against what must be the spontaneous dictates of his reason and taste, one would suspect him of doubting the skill and inspiration of the Deity that endowed him with facile comprehension of his craft. Else it is not easy to understand the mental process that prompts Mr. —— to limp and lag and halt and stumble, as has become his custom, in gait and speech and gesture. Those are not the unwitting blunders of an artist as keen and cunning as Mr. ——. They are, instead, the conscious performances of one seized with a passion for intense individualism, of one exulting in a frenzy of illicit particularity.

Only because Mr. —— is the most distinguished and most regrettable instance of an evil rampant in the theatre here and now, has he been employed to introduce a subject that demands consideration. I have always chosen in such matters to omit mention of individuals, deeming personalities the bane of what

passes for dramatic criticism in these days. But in view of his noble talents, imperiled by the evil in question, it seems not wantonly invidious to cite his case to start conviction.

In a recent note on the grievous decline of a certain theatre, some general regard was given to the inordinate monotony of many of the conspicuous players of the day. And a special mention was made of the disastrous effect of the fault even upon so accomplished an actress and so pleasing a woman as Miss ——, whose mannerisms have finally become positive annoyances. The character of the criticism put upon my comments, some favoring and some otherwise, leads me to recur to the subject, particularly because in quarters where my notions found sympathy and accordance, conclusions somewhat removed from my own intention were accredited to my arguments. Thus, one review of the article in reference observes: "It is bad enough to have the peculiarities of the actors constantly forced on you. But when a cranky manager impresses his own disagreeable personality on the public, as Mr. —— has done more and more pointedly year after year, the public grows first weary and then resentful." All of which may be quite true, but none of which I designed to prove in my comments. For it is by no means clear to my mind that Mr. —— is wholly responsible for the blight that has fallen upon his chief players. No more can I satisfy myself that the conductor of any of the other metropolitan schools of actors is to blame for the prevalent evil of personal idiosyncracy that is making of the theatre a mere commonplace. I

have been told, it is true, that some managers, exploiting players of marked personal favor, forbid these attractive lay-figures to veil their identity with illusive make-ups—with the falsities of wig or beard or any of the various adjuncts of a craft that is essentially deceptive. "No, no," such will say to the player's proposition to take on the outer-show of the character to be impersonated, "you must not disguise yourself. It is you the public come to see—they like to recognize their favorites. Wear you own hair, Miss Smith, and you, Mr. Jones, keep your mustache on. Never mind the author's direction." In some instances, of course, this would account fully for the irritating sameness of appearance and address; but the more radical monotony of players circumstanced as those whose example has been cited before must be sought elsewhere than in employer's autocracy. I am quite certain, for clinching instance, that Mr. Mansfield, in his capacity of manager or stage director, could never have prevailed upon himself in his capacity of actor to act as he did act in some of his own "productions."

It is a habit of superficial students of general evils to lay the blame for their existence upon the public. That is a facile process of explanation, and, thanks to the vanity of mankind, it is oftenest allowed to pass without protest. For, since each and every one of us deems himself superior to the common herd, no one is likely to stand forth to defend the culprit majority. Thus it has happened that to every complaint against the besetting sin of the local theatre the odium of responsibility has been shifted upon the unresisting

public. "If the people didn't like the ways of this or that actor," is the usual report, "they wouldn't go to see him, and there would soon come an end to his career."

Now, this argument would hold unflinchingly were it true that the people really know what they like or dislike in matters of the stage. But it is at least doubtful that such is the case. It is a far safer presumption that they mold and bake their artistic ideals according to the suggestion or dictates of the self-constituted regulators of such matters. A sufficiency of audacious proclamation and ingenious insistence will win the mass of theatre-goers to any absurdity. All depends on the manner of exploitation and certain accidents of circumstance. The famous Count Johannes, or the more recent James Owen O'Connor, was not materially more grotesque in personality or fantastic in method than certain actors of the first importance in these days. And under happier auspices their illicit particularity might have gone unrebuked long enough to have brought them fame and fortune. Instead, the initiators of general opinion happened to find humor in the mimetic arabesques of Johannes and O'Connor and doomed them in consequence to hoots and jeers and a metallic net.

No; if the public is any degree concerned in the sin under discussion it is only as accessory after the fact. And even then their part in the artistic violence is due to ignorance of carelessness rather than to deliberate æsthetic viciousness. They are led into wrong. And though that is never a satisfactory exoneration, it is of some account in determining the essential factor of fault.

But, after all, the thought rationally suggests itself, is not the actor himself chiefly—yes, wholly—to blame for the blunders of egoism and vanity that bury his acquirements and his natural graces beneath a mighty weight of monstrous idiosyncracies, preposterous mannerisms, impertinent affectations? Should not a man whom fortune has endowed with qualities that enable him to make a show of himself to the delight of a million and to his own splendid and easy profit—should not such a man compel himself to mastery of an inclination in the direction of artistic ugliness and abnormality? How, even in remotest degree, can manager or public or press have any share in this demoralization—provided he be anything like the superior creature he pretends to be? Granting even that the actor is entitled to a code of morals peculiarly his own, and that he may set up for himself a system of social amenities and polite customs that would be considered useless by most communities outside of the Papuan Archipelago, the fact still remains that in his capacity as skilled artisan he is bound to conform to certain firmly established laws of decorousness and beauty. Therefore, whatever may be the authority of a player's talent, whatever the fascinations of his personality, he is still rightly subservient to the normal regulations of his calling. He may not assume eccentricities of speech and manner utterly out of keeping with the character that he is called upon to impersonate and trust to his personal command to carry off the absurdities of his affectations.

AN ACTOR OF DISTINGUISHED OBSCURITY

If I were not so thoroughly convinced that judgment of acting is chiefly an affair of personal fancy and individual taste, I should not hesitate to assert that in all the essential merits of its kind the *Lucio* of Mr. —— in a recent production of "Measure for Measure" deserves the most unqualified admiration of any performance lately seen in this community. My own opinion—or notion, which seems to me the more precise word in these matters—I am free to express: no recent scenic essay has given me such keen delight, such a sense of intellectual charm, as did this fanciful impersonation by an actor of no particular fame. The pleasant familiarity with which he grasped Shakespeare's creation unto himself, the easy comprehension of *Lucio's* manner and temper, the ready utterance of his speeches, the fantastical and yet wholly unaffected aptness of gesture, the nice intelligence and consistency of the impersonation, and, above everything, the antique complexion and classic spirit of it all—exquisite! The skill, the taste and zeal of the player colored the comparatively crude *Lucio* into a resemblance of the matchless Mercutio. Athwart the gloom of Shakespeare's comedy of lechery and deceit the kindly braggart's wit shone doubly splendid. And, in the monotone of the performance of the other players, the eager, variant characterization of *Lucio* seemed pitched in a key amazingly refreshing and sympathetic. It

was, in short, an incarnation that doubtless would have satisfied Shakespeare himself, if he were half as reasonable as his friends have reported him. I feel sure that he seldom saw *Lucio* done in his own theatre quite so well. Would there had been some authority to send a crier up and down through the town to bid playgoers and players go forthwith to applaud the unpretentious mummer who made himself one with *Lucio*, according to his deserts! Mr. —— plays Shakespeare; he doesn't recite him—as do most of our actors, even the most sympathetic of them, the most studious and expert—Manager ——'s, for instance. He attacks the author on the side of the playwright, not on that of the poet. He is not afraid of him, nor awed by him—as most of us are when we approach Shakespeare the prophet.

Few actors have sufficient intelligence to understand the meaning of Shakespeare's lines, with their obsolete words, obscure allusions and involved construction. It follows from that, of course, that they are appalled by the task of interpretation and set themselves at it with wits dulled and faculties benumbed by fright. They deem themselves well out of it if they contrive to read the lines intelligibly, and with a proper show of reverence for the author and his commentators. As for really playing the part—it is not once a season that one meets with such a frank, hearty, top-to-toe achievement as that of Mr. ——'s *Lucio!* And its rarity must be my excuse if I have seemed extravagantly enthusiastic in its praise—its rarity and its

surprise. For, as far as I can ascertain, Mr. ——'s is not a name familiar to theatre-goers, and I know certainly that he does not possess what is known as a metropolitan reputation. That, perhaps, is not so surprising as the excellence of his craft and the dignity of his achievement.

* * *

THE CURSE OF A VIS COMICA

Apropos of surprises—the famous Mr. ——'s performance of *David Garrick* was almost as surprising to me as was the obscure Mr. ——'s *Lucio*. The former proved to be much less of an artist than I had supposed him to be. It was several years since I had attended an entertainment of this popular player, and the impressive extent of his reputation, the serious consideration bestowed upon his adventures in the domain of the theatre by contemporary criticism, the almost unequaled frequence of his patronage, inclined me to think that he must have made substantial progress in the refinement of his natural gifts and in the acquirement of new artifices. It was, therefore, with genuine surprise that I discovered the narrow limitations of his innate qualities as discovered by his performance of *Garrick*. I had suspected something of this on observing the details of the *mise-en-scène* during a visit to the theatre a few evenings before, when Mr. —— was appearing in a modern farce. I recall distinctly that the sight of the ugly, monstrous furniture and other stage appointments that made up

the player's environment started a prejudice against the quality of his talents and the sincerity of his pretensions. I could not resist the thought, the instant I caught sight of those hideous chairs and all the other vulgar, garish, crying features of the stage-setting, that no player with an artist's soul within him would or could tolerate such surroundings. He might, if the occasion compelled, act his part on a bare stage, with no other suggestion of an interior scene than a back-drop and two side pieces; but no player with a touch of real beauty in his make-up would have endured such an auction-shop exhibition as surrounded Mr. —— on this occasion. No—I will not admit that absorption in his rôle might have rendered him regardless of such externals. Not even the rhapsody of inspiration could work oblivion to such circumstances.

Perhaps the reader may resent the intrusion of this apparently inconsequential impression, but I am emboldened to confess it because Mr. ——'s subsequent performance in the trivial play of the evening went far toward dispelling the sentiment I had preconceived. It was not alone the obvious personal magnetism that compelled interest in the player. He mimed the farce with such winning directness, such congruity of method, with so much quaint humor and with so many deft touches of apparently cunning elaboration that, for all the banality of his surroundings, one was cozened into the conviction that here was an accomplished actor. Alas! the delusion dissipated before the awkwardness, the sluggishness and coarse-

ness of the player's subsequent impersonation of *Garrick!*

As the hero of the farce, a rôle of homely humor and simplicity, Mr. —— but played himself. When it came to counterfeiting a personality removed from his own, one calling for the display of mind and heart and temperament differing from the comedian's own individuality, he was found wanting utterly. Some workers in the arts are able to surmount the obstacles obtruding from a deficient imagination by the strenuous exercise of a cultivated intelligence; but, at present at any rate, this resource is not at Mr. ——'s command. His *Garrick* damns his mental equipment with the hopelessness of mediocrity. The player does not possess the powers of selection, differentiation, discrimination, in the degree requisite to nice effects. As a result of this deficiency, his *Garrick* is stiff, woodeny, expressionless as the figurehead on a Dutch ship: rude in form, of crude coloring, and unconvincing save in its grotesques. Whatever of dramatic potency the impersonation may boast can be traced directly to the temperamental attractiveness of the man, and not to the finesse of the artist. The characterization in its entirety betrayed not only deficiencies of intellect, but deficiencies of intelligence. It was wanting not only in accuracy of conceit, but in its execution it showed a carelessness, a lack of study and refinement inconsistent with confident consideration of the player as a good artisan. Art accomplishes nothing great without infinite pains. Inspiration may perhaps; but, despite

the judgment of the general and of Mr. ——'s admirers in particular, I do not regard him as an inspired creature.

Indeed, it was curious to note how far afield of the truth Mr. —— went under the guidance of his faulty understanding of the character of *Garrick*, or rather under the misdirection of his close system of acting. This was especially conspicuous in that scene between *Garrick* and *Ada Ingot* wherein, according to the author, the actor struggles between his passion for the lovelorn miss and his sense of honor. As this famous scene was played on the occasion in reference one could not resist the suggestion that *Ada Ingot* had become a downright annoyance to the great *Mr. Garrick*, and his frequent reminders of her duty to her father seemed like vain attempts to rid himself gracefully of her compromising attentions. And in this connection the thought again obtruded itself that no actor with a tithe as much art in his make-up as Mr. —— is accredited with by his admirers, could have permitted or endured such a preposterous treatment of Robertson's comedy as it met with at the hands of Mr. ——'s subordinates. They distorted it into a cheap farce, robbing it of all the satiric intent and pure comedy with which the author has informed his famous little work.

THE REVOLT OF THE UNWILLING DANDY

In the reviews of a society-play lately brought out at a theatre of modish rendezvous I regretted to note that Mr. —— was commended by the gentlemen who write for the daily press for the resumption of his notorious "drawing-room manner." This mysterious quality has been held up for something like half a generation as Mr. ——'s distinctive and peculiar attribute of admiration. In season and out we have seen criticism light upon Mr. ——'s "drawing-room manner" as the one point in his dramatic endeavors commanding laudatory insistence. Until finally one grew to regard this alleged distinction of the actor much as the Athenians came to look upon the justice of Aristides. With what relief and delight, then, we heard Mr. —— accused on one or two occasions of having lost or surrendered this noble grace! The lamentable going-off in the elegance of his port, in the politeness of his gestures, in the airy superiority of his speech, was attributed, I believe, to his prolonged tours in the provinces—among the barbarians and yokels of Boston and Philadelphia and Chicago and San Francisco. That is how the decadence was explained in this central source of modern enlightenment and thumb-touch refinement.

But, from the very beginning, I fancied another cause for the notable variation in the actor's manner. It was the aspiring spirit in Mr. —— rising up in pro-

test and rebellion against a piece of nonsense and ignorance that had persisted beyond his patience. Because he was reputed to visit an exclusive club now and then, to have a cup of tea occasionally with a woman of fashion, to dine sometimes in the company of violet and fine linen, even, on some memorable occasion, to fling his heels in a hunt-ball—the hall-mark of a marvelous elegance was put upon him. So that when he set out to act—as in one of Mr. Jones's plays, for instance—the wit and wisdom of contemporary criticism shook its head sadly and declared that he was not pleasing save in his "drawing-room manners."

What, in all seriousness, do they mean by the phrase? Of course a poor scribbler can have no familiarity with the modes and manners of elaborate leisure; but it has fallen to the lot of every man some time or other in the course of a career even moderately varied to catch a glimpse of fashion. And I submit to the cognoscenti whether the accident that Mr. —— is possessed of a graceful figure, an easy port and a competent tailor should brand him as a drawing-room actor? No wonder he took to throwing his arms about and making unhandsome faces and lifting his voice to a strident pitch in an effort to break through the contemptible trammels that popular fancy and its reporters had woven about him.

Let us hope for the sake of all that is sweet and earnest in the theatre that the revolt of Mr. —— will not have been in vain, that we shall have an end to this silly, ignorant babble of "drawing-room manners" in

connection with players who are suspected of having entanglements with the fashionable world. I have in mind, as I write, a woman who entered the theatre through the front door of society; she is no whit superior to her stage companions in any of the outer show of politenesses, and yet she never appears in a new gown but Criticism proclaims that she wears it as one to the manner born! Persistency in such nonsense becomes aggravating to the point of insult, and how it can maintain so sure a place in comments on the art of the theatre passes all understanding. The stage in all times and in all countries has been graced by great-ladies who were bred as orange-girls, by women who trod the boards, fresh from the circus-ring, with as much dignity and charm, with as much of the *dea-certe* progress as the daintiest scion of centuries of drawing-room ancestors. As for Mr. —— and all the nonsensical chatter of his exclusive elegance derived from five o'clock teas and pink luncheons—why, I have seen on the stage the most debonair dandies, very flowers of foppery, pinks of modish chivalry who, I am quite sure, had no more intimate acquaintance with elegant life than such as may be gathered at Columbus Avenue punches and New Rochelle conversaziones.

* * *

EVADING A REPUTATION

That young Mr. ——, who some time since appeared in New York in a repertory exclusively Shakespearian, I regard as the most fortunate actor of the hour, in

that he has thus far escaped the cant and clamor of the crowd—the crowd that dinned the artless Mr. ——'s *vis comica* into that player's ears until he could no longer hear the promptings of whatever of æsthetic truth there may be in him: the crowd that set up Mr. —— into a glass of fashion and mold of form, until, in disgust and despair, he sought to distort the image beyond recognition. The best success of their more obscure colleague has been his failure to attract the fickle followers that hem in a prosperous actor and hinder his advance in any direction save that ordered by their own fancies. He has already deserved a reputation, but he has not yet secured it. And therein lies his richest promise. It is a dangerous thing in this country for a player to get a reputation—either good or bad. Sometimes I ponder whether that is not the reason so many actors abstain from getting reputation.

It would have been vastly better for the much-photographed Mr. ——, for example, if he had never won a reputation as a bad actor. For although in the past two or three years he has become an excellent mummer in certain rôles, the public and the critics prefer to remain in their former fond opinion. With the gorgeous Miss —— it is much the same. Beautiful, tuneful, but a stick—the community has so decided: splendid to look upon, charming to hear—but a wax figure when it comes to acting! "But her *La Cigale* was a revelation," one objects—"her *Grande Duchesse* a jewel in color and sparkle." No matter—she's a stick! And so I suppose if she were suddenly to

develop the gifts of a Dejazet, a Rejane and a Duse she would still have to remain a stick to the end of her days. That is what has come to her from having a reputation. It is true that matters are not quite the same with those who have good reputations; but when one regards the fate of the most approved actors of here and now, one cannot but congratulate the youthful disciple of Shakespeare on not having any reputation at all. He is all the more likely to become famous.

* * *

THE POTENCY OF SMUDGE

A curious person who signs himself or herself "A Student of the Stage" asks me to name, offhand, the greatest artist on the boards in New York; "the player," to quote the correspondent's language, "about whose art there is the least difference of opinion among the critics."

But for this complementary phrase—which, it will be admitted, puts a very different phase on the matter—I should not venture a reply to the question. As it stands now, I am called upon not to express my own opinion, but merely to report the judgment of the prevalent criticism. I think there is very little doubt that the player whose successive mimetic achievements receive praise most nearly unanimous is Miss —— of the Empire Theatre company.

There is probably not a critic in New York City—with the exception of William Winter, who has odd notions about such things, and Eliphalet Beeswax, who

writes only for magazines—that does not proclaim Miss —— a "true artist," whenever she appears in a new rôle or revives an old one. There may be a diversity of opinion among the censors of the theatre regarding Richard Mansfield, or Julia Arthur, or Maude Adams, or Charles Coghlan, or James A. Hearne, or N. C. Goodwin, or Ada Rehan, or Mrs. Carter, or John Drew—even Edwin Booth was not without his fault-pickers toward the end of his splendid career—but in the chorus declaiming Miss ——'s "perfect art" and "æsthetic verity" there is never one discordant voice, not even the smallest. Messrs. Winter and Beeswax may possibly hold an opinion varying from that of their colleagues, but if they do so they sensibly refrain from uttering it in print. In view of these facts it may be stated, without fear of contradiction, that Miss ——'s talents are more generally acknowledged and more persistently celebrated than those of any other player on the metropolitan stage. She has reached that happy altitude where she queens it over criticism; she can do no wrong in the sovereignty of Art. She may venture effects that puzzle, confound and stagger her students, but they realize that the resultant shock must be due to their constitutional and temperamental limitations, and not to any indiscretion on the part of a true artist who cannot possibly go wrong.

On the first night of "The Conquerors," Miss —— appeared in a facial make-up that would give a nervous child fits, and that made strong men instinctively grab their hats and coats. Her beautiful features were

buried beneath a stratum of plaster-of-Paris, whiter than the shroud of the Reaper. Eyebrows and lashes shed clouds of soot, like a coke-oven chimney. Her lips were reddened to the hue of flame and lined to the thickness of a Patagonian's. Those dainty pink ears, of which even Eliphalet Beeswax has written in glorious Munsey prose, were made to stick out like erratic rutabagas. The consummate craft that worked these distortions made Miss —— look like nothing that one ever sees in this life and like the things that one hopes to avoid in the life beyond. Criticism was flabbergasted for a moment, but, pulling itself together, it took in the genius denoted by the phantasy and in next morning's papers wove chaplets of rosemary and pansies to immortalize Miss ——'s freshest success. Scarcely a review of the piece that failed to repeat the "true art" and "marvelous realism" and "æsthetic rectitude" of this admirably audacious protagonist. Only William Winter and Eliphalet Beeswax neglected to note the prodigy. Miss —— did not attempt any acting beyond the freaks of physiognomy, but her achievement with the flour-barrel and paint-tub was hailed with a unanimous delight rarely evoked by the boldest flights of a Duse or Bernhardt.

"A momentary glance at this never-erring artist," one critic exclaimed, "is as satisfying as an entire Christmas pantomime."

I quote little things of this sort to explain why I have unhesitatingly named Miss —— in answer to my correspondent's question. And I have cited her ex-

periences in "The Conquerors" merely because it is the instance nearest to hand. For it is in no way exceptional. No matter what her rôle may be, no matter what the quality of its presentation in such trifles as conception, discretion of detail, reasonableness, she is certain of supreme success if only she smudge her face with enough soot, paint her ears yellow, or puff her hair in curl-papers. William Winter and Eliphalet Beeswax may doubt the peerlessness of Miss ——'s art, but they have not the nerve to flaunt their misgivings in the face of the rest of the critics.

As for myself, I can only wonder that Miss ——'s managers have not given her an opportunity to bring that prejudiced twain to terms; that she is not given a part which will discover her resplendent gifts even to their blinking eyes. Beeswax, at least, is still open to conviction, and even Winter would not care to stand alone against the phalanx of opposition. Then, when the proclamation of Miss ——'s "perfect art" was absolutely unanimous, she would stand as an eternal inspiration for students of the theatre. The way to success unquestioned and single-voiced would be clear to every aspirant for scenic honors. The dramatic marvels in a bag of flour, a can of red paint and a stove-pipe's quantum of soot, would stare aspiration full in the face: "perfect art," "æsthetic verity," "consummate craft," and such things could be had at the corner grocery, and a bad actor would be a diverting rarity. In view of that pleasing possibility, Messrs. Winter and Beeswax are in duty bound to join the

chorus that several times each season proclaims the matchless potency of smudge.

* * *

AN UNNECESSARY IMPORTATION

That Miss —— is an actress of the innate gifts or the professional attainments that justify her exploitation in this country as a remarkable histrionic personality I gainsay vehemently. She is an unnecessary importation. While more crafty than I presumed her to be, she is also less charming. I fancied her crude but commanding—like Clara Morris. She proves to be ripe but unimpressive—recalling Margaret Mather. The temperament of which English critics puffed so noisily turns out to be nothing finer than "gush." She lacks flavor, the down, the savor of unforced lusciousness—like a hothouse peach.

This suggestion of artificiality and forced culture is constantly obtrusive in Miss ——'s work. She is a made actress: laboriously made. Or perhaps it were more exact to say that the actress is as well made as such things ever can be made. I can almost see now the processes by which this particular handiwork was turned out. There was in the beginning a pretty face of mobile features; a graceful, lissome figure; a plastic, docile nature; and, in all probability, a lush yearning for the stage. Then came teachers—a train of them: voice-developers, lung-expanders, orthoepists, elocutionists, masters of foil and of dance, professors of Delsarte—the entire cabal of workers in mediocrity.

Private theatricals are a circumstance of this period of actress-making. And they pave the way for the next step—a professional tour in the provinces for experience, custom, confidence and authority.

It would seem as if all that should suffice; but the friends and patrons of the young woman, and possibly even she herself, feel there is still something wanting. The fire of genius needs a little more coaxing. She doesn't touch you as Hading does, she doesn't thrill you as Sara does, she doesn't enthrall you as Duse does. She hasn't even the nice finish of Miss Terry. So off goes the aspirant to watch and study each and all of these mistresses of the actor's craft. She is docible, as all ambitious mediocrity is; she learns a trick here, a mannerism there, and catches a bit of a third's method.

The resultant product is a copy of an actress, a counterfeit of an artist. It deceives no one; for it rings false at every touch of passion, sentiment or even the most ordinary impulse. The spontaneous discrimination of genius is not there; nor the fine sense of values; nor the poetry.

That is the fatal defect—the earthiness, the soullessness, the quality that mistakes animalism for passion, sensuality for sentiment, "gush" for imagination.

The effect is distinctly ugly. Possibly the physical attributes of Miss —— may contribute to it chiefly: the full, red lips, the large, lambent, but not luminous eyes, the placid, easy face, the plastic figure, the entirety suggestive of *bonne femme*.

For my own part, though, I incline to believe that the causes lie deeper. Had the pure fire of genial artistry ever burned within that voluptuous doll it would have quite consumed the sensual accidents. The truth is, Miss —— is not a born actress—only a made one. She fails of effect for the same reason that did Margaret Mather—of whom Miss ——'s method constantly reminds me.

Good artifice—to say nothing of art—should have availed to free her from some of the ridiculous blemishes of her performance. To reiterate, she is not even a well-made actress. She has not even acquired discretion, an appreciation of proportion. The most trivial episode she treats with all the turgid importance of a critical dramatic incident. When she bids one, "Have a piece of cake," she takes the center of the stage and spouts the commonplace with a significance that makes you watch the outcome of the affair to see if some strong dramatic situation is to grow out of the acceptance or refusal of the proffered tidbit.

Indeed, this is no exaggeration. I recall distinctly that Miss —— made so much ostentatious fuss during an entire scene at the tea-table and she put such vivid intention into that query about a piece of cake that I felt convinced the episode was to play a decisive part in the *dénouement* of the play. All the "business" of the rôle she exaggerated and overelaborated to an extent that indicated a complete want of the sense of relative values. She defied her

lover's enemies and raised a parasol with equal intensity. When she leaves the stage for a moment to get her hat, she behaves quite as if she were going straight to her doom. And when she returns, it is with corresponding sensationalism. The ingénue is kissed with the same fire and fervor and noisy token of enjoyment that mark the bestowal of the marital buss. The easel at which she makes a pretense of painting is accorded the same affectionate, intimate interest as her invalid mother. Animate or inanimate, cipher or unit, the commonplace or the tremendous, passing notion or whelming emotion—it is all one to Miss ——. In the shallow crucible of her craft one and all reduce to identity.

Those of Miss ——'s admirer's who feel compelled to acknowledge her failings in the matter of delicacy and discretion insist all the more vigorously on her possession of power. Surely they will not maintain that it is the power of the really great actresses with whom she is commonly compared. It is not the power to prompt joy or sadness, sympathy or pity, of any sentiment or emotion. It is not the power to thrill or fascinate or even agitate mildly. She touches neither the heart not the imagination. And scores of actresses with no pretension to Miss ——'s fame and training can do that. One merely sits and looks at Miss —— and waits, waits in vain for all that laborious, extravagant, gargoylish trick to start a ripple of emotion, to touch one cord of sentiment. Whatever power she may have is specious; the power

of turmoil and tantrums; the power imparted by the voice-developer, the lung-expander, the elocutionist, the professor-of-Delsarte; the empty power of the gaudy Chinese-cracker.

That sort of power Miss ——'s train of teachers could impart to her—could impart to anyone. The power of the other sort comes at the caprice of chance or the ordering of fate. Instructed, developed and studied, it evolves the genial command of a Bernhardt, Duse, Hading and Maddern. Left to itself it still works out a Clara Morris and, in a lesser degree, an Effie Ellsler and half a dozen actresses whose names recur to one, and whose gifts flashed in the pan because—but of that another time.

In the dispensation of this sort of power, chance or fate overlooked Miss ——. Her teachers, of course, could not supply the omission. But she has made the Chinese-cracker kind serve; she has audacity, and with that one goes far.

I hope, sincerely, that no one will ever be deterred from going to see Miss ——'s performance by what I have written here. She is a convincing symbol of what an actress should not be; an exponent, made conspicuous by expert exploitation, of ineffective scenic methods; an instance of the fatuity of fantastic elaboration designed to conceal a dramatic vacuum. To study and discover the sources of Miss ——'s failings should be a liberal education to local theatre-goers. If her sojourn among us results in such a desirable consummation, Miss —— will not have been

"an unnecessary importation." And if, more than that, a realization of her essential mediocrity shall arouse the community to a sense of our really provincial proneness to accept with complacence and outright favor whatever of pretentiousness and fanfare comes to us from across the seas, then will Miss —— have been a blessing in disguise.

* * *

THE UNDOING OF MISS ——

For all the authority of her reputation and vogue I will not pretend to think Miss ——, in the matter of her mimetic abilities, considerably above the plane of the concert-hall. In the face of the fact that she "draws" large audiences I would not undertake to deny her a certain quality of magnetism; but I am not so sure that it is not the magnetism of vulgar curiosity. Certainly it is not the dominance of a fine dramatic intelligence, nor of that perplexing theatric instinct that evolves proper effects from mere imagination. For the young woman does not know how to read the most matter-of-fact lines. Of such elemental mechanics as accent, emphasis, intonation, inflection—to say nothing of pronunciation—Miss —— is either careless or ignorant. The most obvious proprieties in these matters seem beyond her ken. If she were to ask for a piece of bread and butter, on the stage, she would in all probability place particular emphasis on the preposition. And were she to say "Good-morning" she would doubtless accent the ultimate of

the noun. I have listened in amazement and something very like despair to her persistent abuse of the simplest ethics of reason and common sense in her misinterpretation of the author's lines. So far from being the artist that she is proclaimed in some quarters, she is, in this matter at least, an example to be shunned by every player with the most ordinary equipment of intelligence and taste.

It is too much, perhaps, to ask a star, a young star, a star that has begun her career with profitable fanfare and furore, to evince appreciation of the value of repose, to discover a sense of its worth for light and shade, for color, for proportion, for atmosphere; but it is not violent criticism to protest againt the gross exaggerations, the coarse—I hate to use the word vulgar—grotesques that made Miss ——'s characterization of the rôle in mind an artistic absurdity, a violence to the dainty, piquant creation of the author. Her repeated employment of pugilistic gesture, of eccentric, sprinter-like stride, of meaningless facial contortions, her evident striving for "tough," "sporty," "soubrette row" effects, put the heroine completely out of the atmosphere of the story, its time, scenes and circumstances; they transferred her to the afterpiece of the variety hall, if not within perilous proximity to the beer-garden.

If Miss —— has any sincere well-wishers among those who giggle at her show of ultra-sophistication, at her confident parade of "horsiness" and "flyness" —those are not polite words, but have they any urban

equivalents?—they will cease to pretend delight at what is ugly, gross and wholly ineffective save with those to whose vulgarity an actress of her pretensions, and possibly ambitions, has no right to minister. To be fresh, froward, impertinent, even in a degree ruinous to artistry, may be forgiven in a young actress of commanding popularity; but Miss —— alas! is all that and much more.

I am told by one versed in the values of theatric entities that the chief merit of Miss ——, "the thing that you can't get away from," is the way he expressed it, is that she "fills the stage." I suppose that means that she holds the notice of the audience, makes her presence felt, creates an impression. Admitting that to be true, it disproves nothing I have said in blame of her methods and manners. Any stage figure sufficiently advertised does as much—Corbett, Steve Brodie, Mrs. Langtry; and I suppose Mrs. Moore will "fill the stage" in due season. Not that I would include the new "star" in the category of these mere notorieties; but I insist that in her case, as in that of the others, curiosity of no very exalted order is accountable for the popular vogue and interest that make her and her congeners seem to "fill the stage."

FAMILIAR CRITICISM

Of Mr. ——'s *Falstaff* one may say that the actor attacks the rôle with good intentions; but there commendation must stop. Doubtless everything that Mr. —— could do with the rôle has been done, studiously, scrupulously, zealously. But his limitations, not only artistic but temperamental, are far from compassing the counterfeiting of *Falstaff's* personality. At no moment does he suggest, even vaguely, the rollicking, amorous butt of old sack that Shakespeare fashioned. He lacks unction. Which same has been said of every other actor that has attempted the rôle in this generation. There is no infection in the chuckle of this *Falstaff*, no responsive laugh in his sallies, no fun even in his mighty paunch or in his sodden, rubicund face. It is not exactly a stupid *Falstaff* that Mr. —— shows us, nor a silly one; but uninteresting, wanting vitality, variety, and spirits. In short, it is not Shakespeare's *Falstaff* at all; merely a mechanical, woodeny imitation that does not deceive anyone for a moment.

I wonder that the *Mistress Ford* and *Mistress Page* contrived to put such life into their pranks with so slow and cloutish a suitor. The Misses —— and —— carry on quite as if they thought their *Falstaff* the devil of a fellow that he pretends to be. The former has been generally blamed, I believe, for the "modern spirit" of her impersonation of *Mistress Page*. Miss ——, on the other hand, has been complimented for im-

parting the opposite quality to her treatment of *Mistress Ford.* The real state of the matter appears to me thus: the *Mistress Ford*, by virtue of a certain stiffness of port, a certain starched precision of diction, and various exaggerations and affectations, inspires in the unthinking a sense of appropriate antiquity and bookishness very effective, I assure you, with the injudicious. As for the "modern spirit" charged against the *Mistress Page*—it is nothing more reprehensible than a spirit of naturalness, simplicity, and easy good terms with the character. The actress plays the part as if she was not afraid of it, nor of Shakespeare either. She evidently realizes that the woman of the fifteenth century cutting such fandangoes as *Mistress Page* indulges in with her chum, *Mistress Ford*, would behave pretty much as a nineteeth century woman in similar circumstances. Therefore, there is in her performance little or none of the depressing suggestion of stilts and blank verse that is generally regarded as the essential element in fitting Shakespearian effect.

It is curious, the persistence of the notion that Shakespeare must be approached in a manner and temper reserved for the especial attack of his plays. It is a notion, too, that seems to obtain even with individuals and schools of the finer quality and repute. Indeed, very few of the actors of the day appear to be able to rid themselves of the idea that Shakespeare is a legend, a myth. If they could only wake up to the knowledge that the "divine William" was a practical manager, who wrote his plays to act, not to read! The great

charm of the Irving performances of Shakespeare is to be traced directly to the familiar, intimate spirit that pervades them. Under this influence the characters move and speak like men and women—not puppets spouting a poet's lines.

The *Dr. Caius* of Mr. —— is a conspicuous instance of the happy effects of an actor throwing off the mystic poetic pall with which Shakespeare is so frequently muffled. As in the case of the *Mistress Page*, too, this performance has been assailed by undiscerning, conventional criticism for its "modern spirit." We are told, with something of a grieved air, that Mr. —— makes a "low comedy" part of *Dr. Caius*. What is it but a low comedy part? And did Shakespeare drag it into the comedy for any other reason than to catch the groundlings with its broken English and French extravagance and all-around nonsense? Or would they have us believe that there is some subtle psychic significance in the rôle, or a purpose of state in its employment? Happily Mr. —— knows much more about the real intent of *Dr. Caius* than the critics who shy at the "modern spirit" of his interpretation, and he gives us a deliciously humorous, readily comprehensible delineation of a perfectly simple character. And because one has a genuine, up-to-date laugh at the drolleries of Mr. ——'s *Dr. Caius* one need not be uneasy as to the actor's fidelity to the intent of the dramatist.

OF A LADY'S VOICE

At Wildairs, in *Clorinda's* garden, there grew some glorious roses of full and luscious bloom, sensuous of scent and of the most wondrous scarlet hue. Such a red they were as gives the purple to imperial robes, the cardinal to prelates. And when the sun fell full upon them as they clambered about the trysting dial, or when the moonlight mellowed their hot complexion, they seemed to me the very emblem of a voice that I once listened to under the skies of Ischia and that I lately heard again in the theatre. If the muses had denied Miss —— every other gift and left her only that flower of a voice, she would yet suffice for my delight. Under the spell of its magic timbre, that charms like music on Venetian waters, I must jog judgment and spur discretion lest the faults of her performance escape me. It is the voice of pure romance and love. Not of love's frolics and raptures, but its sorrows and tragedies. Like love, too, it blinds, and if one be not wary it will shut out blemishes.

And there be blemishes in Miss ——'s impersonation of "A Lady of Quality." I have before this pointed out certain faults in her methods and neglects in her execution. And on some occasions she has contrasted my enthusiastic acclaim of her gifts with such predication of her failings and done me the honor of proclaiming me "inconsistent." In retort I can only felicitate her on her impatience of criticism; it is often the token of genius. There shall be no quarrel with

her on the score of confidence in her craft or faith in her star.

Besides, if her talents be of the rare and exalted quality that I generally fancy them, a brief time should suffice, now that they may develop in fit and sympathetic ambiency, to bring them to the last refinement. If she does not become the foremost actress in the American theatre it will be in spite of the most luxuriant equipment in purely natural attributes of any native player that has come under my notice. Only personal acquaintance, of course, can discover the caste of a player's mind, but, viewed across the footlights, Miss —— presents a wholly convincing show of theatric supremacy. The gods have been generous with her. She need only deal with herself as kindly as they.

And in the second act of this play her attainments discover a dignity and touch a perfection that quite justify the trust of the powers that endowed her. They did not waste their favors on the woman who shamed her betrayer and ravished her audience with the nobility of her anger and the sweet majesty of her presence. In the moment of her denunciation of *Sir John Oxon* Miss —— stood firmly on the loftiest heights of symbolism. Refulgent in the very sin that her lover had taught her, she stood forth a glorious figure, commanding, thrilling, and with something of the expression that the great Sir Joshua put into the picture of the Tragic Muse.

If these words seem extravagant, pray remember that I pretend to report only my own personal impression,

and that I have repeatedly affirmed my belief that judgment in matters of the theatre is almost wholly an affair of individual fancy. For my part I shall hold for many a day the memory of that enthralling presentment. *Osmonde*, *Dunstanwolde*, *Oxon*, might well sue for such a creature as *Clorinda Wildairs* appears in that flight of Miss ——'s graces. Age, rank and rakishness might well covet her charms.

How is it possible for an actress of such firm skill to miss the contrast in tone, key and port requisite for the fit illustration of the climax of the fourth act? Just because of the exquisite delight that one phase of her quality inspires, I noted with all the greater irritation Miss ——'s failure to bring into proper relief the telling episode: "Take this message to Sir John Oxon; he has just gone from me." She separates the detail—a most essential one—from the preceding turmoil of the scene by none of the affected ease and counterfeit composure that its importance in the movement of the drama demands. The incident remains of almost the same complexion as the tragedy precedent. And the completed picture loses a dash of high-light that would add mightily to its impressiveness. The device is so patent—how does it escape the actress? Perhaps, carried away by the impetuosity and madness of the circumstance, her artifice stumbles and her craft refuses what her wit dictates. Perhaps it is that. But I incline rather to think the defect one peculiar to her *genre*. For again in the last act it trapped her into wrong—in the scene wherein she explains to *Sir*

Christopher her solicitude about the walling-up of the cellars. From Miss ——'s reading I am quite sure *Sir Christopher* would have guessed her uncanny secret.

* * *

MR. ——'S MASTERLY IMPERSONATION OF HIMSELF

Mr. —— should never play anything but himself. As an impersonator of *Mr.* —— he is without a peer on the American stage, or on the stage of any other country, for that matter. No other actor of this generation has made such an exhaustive study of the character, sounded its depths, touched its well-defined limitations, mastered all its cranks and wiles and caught the shifting lights of the rôle, as has Mr. ——. His impersonation of the character is always vivid, quick, lusty—a classic in its way. Just as Mr. Jefferson's impersonation of *Bob Acres* is a classic, and Mr. Gillette's counterfeit of—of—well, of any of the characters that he reduces to *Mr. Gillette.*

Nor is the rôle by any means an easy one. Indeed, to any player but Mr. —— it would present insuperable difficulties. The *vis comica* and the *vox*, too, are his in the very degree demanded by the exigencies of the occasion. The gentle authority of his impudence, the airy assault upon the more delicate proprieties, the frank and unabashed swerve into pathos, the facile touseling of sparse hairs—what rival can compare with him in these equipments? And when, added to these, there is a magnetism of personality that compels

laughter from the spectator with a mere toss of the hand, a lift of the eyebrows, a mumbled "gag," an ancient bit of business with siphon or cocktail—why, art may go hang! For her most devoted worshiper need not hope, with the aid of her rarest devices and most secret charms, to approach the perfection of his symbolism in the rôle that he has made his own. I veritably believe Mr. —— is the most popular actor of our generation, and wholly because of his scenic characterization of *Mr.* —— himself.

As he said in the play at the Knickerbocker Theatre —but I had almost forgotten the play. And yet it was an excellent play—for Mr. ——, of course. The author put many bright speeches into the mouth of the hero, and Mr. —— lost no time in putting them into his own mouth, where they took on a glibness and a drollness surpassing the author's fondest hopes. And he was set to perform a variety of absurd and ludicrous and humorous works, which he likewise performed with a riot of absurdity, ludicrousness and humor possible only to him. The playwright pretends that it is a creature of her fancy that cuts all of these capers of quip and frolic, but she fools only the audience. Mr. —— knows himself too well to be taken in by any such flim-flams. And he discovers his cognizance of the trick by his treatment of the serious episodes in which the author attempts to force him to quit playing *Mr.* ——. I recall that he dealt similarly with the author of "David Garrick," and I have no doubt he would treat the author of "Hamlet" just as cavalierly.

The men and women in the farce do many things that would be preposterous and intolerable were it not that they are done in the interest of Mr. ——: for the development and illumination of his distinct characterization of *Mr.* ——. I can almost fancy a play in which he alone, by himself, would suffice for the fit and complete presentation of the rôle; but in the existing conditions of the theatre it is just as well, perhaps, that the author has employed the adjuncts indicated. They throw Mr. ——'s picture of *Mr.* —— into relief, as it were. If they are not essential they are assistant, at least—like the scenery and furniture and calciums and siphons.

PN 2266 N5 Nirdinger, Charles Frederic
Masques and mummers

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY

NOT WANTED IN RBSC